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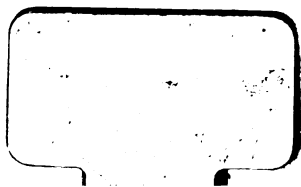
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THE STORY
OF
MADEMOISELLE D'ESTANVILLE.

BY THE
HON. MRS. HENRY WEYLAND CHETWYND,
AUTHORESS OF "NEIGHBOURS AND FRIENDS," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOLUME I.



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AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED TO
MY FRENCH FRIENDS.

MDLLE. D'ESTANVILLE.

CHAPTER I.

IN one of the most beautiful and fertile valleys of Normandy stood the Château d'Estanville : quaint and old, without any pretension to architectural beauty, it imposed upon you by the grandeur of its proportions and by its position. It stood half way up a hill, and behind it, and all round it, except in front, were masses of chestnut-trees and acacias ; cherry blossom in profusion peeped out amongst the varied green of other trees, and higher up the hill were firs that clothed its summit and broke the skyline with their indented foliage.

The ground sloping away in front was broken up into large flower-beds, once perhaps carefully kept, but now overgrown with

shrubs; lower down, groups of magnificent trees were scattered here and there through a large park; an ill-kept avenue of stately poplar-trees led upwards to the château from the remains of the porter's lodge; and the boundary of the domain on the side near the road was made by a river that, pent up into narrow limits higher up the valley, widened into an important stream as it passed the grounds of d'Estanville, and flowed on to the sea; which was two miles off.

Across this river stretched a picturesque bridge, and near the high road were some splendid old gates, which were as carefully locked now by Antoine, the old concierge, as if marauders and evil-disposed persons were not kept in order by the care of the police and the judicious severity of the emperor. These gates were a curiosity in themselves; armorial bearings and quaint devices, crowns and heraldic emblazonments, told all learned in such matters how often the d'Estanville family had intermarried with noble and royal blood; and if people cared to know, and did not find themselves equal to so much elaborate an-

nouncement of ancestral honours, Antoine was always able to explain things, and would dilate upon the splendour of the family alliances in old days, with an amount of pride and satisfaction that was not decreased by the offering of a small *pour-boire* when he had concluded his story.

The old château boasted of an archway that was almost out of keeping with the size of the building, large as it was; and carved over it, and round it, were repeated the same armorial bearings and royal devices. But the huge doors had long been out of use; a small door with a rough bolt gave admittance, cut out of the panels in a manner so utterly without consideration for the beauty of the carving, or the nobility it represented, that its hinges actually turned upon the quarterings of the very Prince d'Estanville who had espoused Marguerite, own cousin to the then reigning sovereign.

Behind the château the ground had been converted into one of those small kitchen gardens that are so especially neat and trim, every square inch of which was made available, and covered with vegetables, thriving as they some-

how only do in France ; with care, climate, and skill, all arrayed in their favour.

The one thing that struck you more than anything else was the utter absence of any sound indicating life from the château itself ; such a place seemed as though it must possess a score of servants, yet you heard no sound, nothing save the cawing of the rooks, the distant happy farmyard sounds, the song of birds, the rushing of the river, the distant solemn roaring of the sea—from the house nothing. It was early summer, every lovely acacia-tree was waving and bending with its heavy blossoms, sending far and near its delicious fragrance ; a slight breeze sent showers of cherry-blossoms to the ground, and rustled the leaves of the poplar-trees ; the sun was already warming everything, and sending down through the pure clear air that golden light that enhances the beauty of that sunny country so much ; and it was nearly eleven o'clock when a side door of the château opened, and a young girl came out, and stood for a moment as if the sunshine did her good. She was about seventeen, slight, lithe, and very graceful.

She put a newspaper over her head, finding the sun too hot, and went round to the back, calling, in a soft subdued voice, "Jacqueline, Jacqueline."

Very pretty, though possessing hardly one regular feature; her clear brunette complexion had a rich carnation tinge that came and went with every passing emotion; her eyes, large, long, and very dark, had the liquid look that both gives softness and enhances brilliancy; her small nose had the well-bred and well-cut nostril that gives such a spirited look to the face, and the upper lip was so short, that her small white teeth were seen at every word. She waited one or two moments, and then her voice rang out again, this time sharply and impatiently, "Jacqueline."

"Mademoiselle" Jacqueline, sending her voice first (a very shrill French voice), followed it at her leisure. "I cannot be everywhere at one moment, Mademoiselle. I was up stairs. I could not be here at the same time."

She was tall, upright, and well made; her aquiline nose and long eyes, the handsome face and its shrewd expression, proclaimed her

Norman descent, as did the rich liquid sound of her patois, which had a softness much wanting more to the north. She wore the flat lace cap peculiar to her part of the country, but the rest of her costume was modified by long service at the Château d'Estanville.

"Jacqueline," said Marie, lowering her voice a little, and taking off her newspaper, which she replaced by a large cabbage-leaf, "I have such news to tell you; wait for one moment, that I may find the place."

Jacqueline's eyes and hands expressed her indignation. "Mademoiselle screams for me, as though several cows were spoiling the garden, or that a fox had eaten the fat chickens, and simply because Mademoiselle thinks she has some news to tell me. I am at my busiest moment. Madame's chocolate not yet made, the soup only begun, nothing yet prepared for the luncheon, and Mademoiselle screams. . . . I leave all; I fly; and it is for this!"

"What have we for luncheon?" asked Marie, to gain time as she looked through the columns of the paper.

"Soup, leek soup," answered Jacqueline, a

very little propitiated, "and a salad. A little cold chicken (if the cat has not got hold of it I will make it into a fricassée); then there is a cream cheese. I will add radishes if Mademoiselle wishes."

"Leek soup," said Marie, absently. "I don't think I like leek soup, Jacqueline; it is always the same."

"Not like the excellent leek soup, Mademoiselle! Do I hear you aright? and how can you conscientiously say it is always the same? Sometimes I thicken it with bread, or potatoes, sometimes with white beans, rice, or vermicelli; I make variety."

"But always leeks," said Marie; "never mind, Jacqueline, it cannot be helped. I believe it is only because when I see it so often it makes me feel so poor, that I do not like it. I say to myself, Leeks are very plentiful, and we are very poor, and it makes me sad."

Jacqueline sighed; Marie found her place and began to read. "'The opening of the railway to Ortan-sur-Mer has already produced magnificent results. House-rent has risen enormously; several English families have

already engaged houses, and we are justified in predicting a splendid future for this hitherto quiet place. With the new baths, casino, and hotels, the splendid scenery and many advantages it possesses, there is no reason why Ortansur-Mer should not take its place as the first of all our watering-places eventually. Already, also, the surrounding country is beginning to come in for its share of these advantages; the long-deserted mansion of d'Occtrung has found a purchaser, and Monsieur Maître arrived two days ago to take possession. A brilliant future is certainly opening before us.' There, Jacqueline," said Marie, laying her paper down, "I call *that* news."

Jacqueline mused. "English families," she said; "then they will want servants, and I shall get rid of Lisette."

"Lisette!" exclaimed Marie; "I thought she was such a good girl."

"Excellent," said Jacqueline, sarcastically, "only she breaks me something every day; now it is a cup, and then a plate; poor thing! she cannot help it. Being an orphan, my good heart prevented my being able to turn her

adrift upon the wide world. And she can go into an English family; it is the very thing. She has enormously the bump of destruction, and would ruin anybody."

"Your good heart does not consider it wrong to place her in an English family," said Marie, laughing.

"Mademoiselle does not see what a very great difference there is," said Jacqueline, reproachfully. "The English are very rich, every one knows that, and they can afford servants with slippery fingers."

"I wish we were rich, Jacqueline," said the young girl; "it must be very pleasant never to have to sit and mend a hole in one's gown, and never to care so much what one does."

"You may be rich some day, my dear Mademoiselle," said Jacqueline, consolingly; "you may marry some one who will give you everything. A nice kind old gentleman, who will give you cachemires and diamonds in profusion."

"Cachemires are heavy," said Marie d'Estanville. "I don't think I care about diamonds,

and I should not like marrying an old man at all, Jacqueline."

"No!" said Jacqueline. "I think it is much better; but you don't know the world, Mademoiselle."

"Supposing some one, a little rich and rather young, wanted to marry me?" said Mademoiselle d'Estanville, slowly.

"Unless he was rich he would require a dowry," said Jacqueline. "I have heard of such things, but I do not believe them; and a young man who would have all the money on his side would be a great deal of trouble; he would always think he had the right of looking at your milliner's bills—and call you extravagant; men are all alike. Now an elderly man has fixed tastes, and would always try to make you contented; so long as you had a very good cook, he would be very easily managed; all your *objets de luxe* would go down without a chance of discovery under the head of household necessities. It would be quite easy."

"If I ever marry," said Marie, dreamily, her dark eyes looking out upon the sunny land-

scape, "I should like to marry a hero or a poet."

"Mademoiselle!" exclaimed Jacqueline, in utter bewilderment.

"Some one," continued Marie, "whom I should be very, very proud of, whom I could honour as well as love, and some one who would make all the world admire him!"

"Mademoiselle!" Jacqueline's remonstrances ended there; a short quick pull sent the loosely-hung French bell vibrating, and she flew to carry Madame's chocolate, and to scold Lisette for not having done all that she herself ought to have done.

Marie sat still and went off into one of those daydreams that in her solitary life formed one of her great amusements.

Except an old family friend who lived about two miles off, and two or three acquaintances who lived at Ortan-sur-Mer, the d'Estanville family saw no one. Madame d'Estanville had fallen into certain retired habits when her husband's death had opened her eyes to the enormous extravagance he had been guilty of, and which had lessened her slender fortune as well

as completely destroyed his own ; and Marie at seventeen had lived entirely at d'Estanville with her mother and Jacqueline, a *souffre douleur* (who was perpetually being changed), and Antoine, who was concierge, gardener, herd, game-keeper, and park-keeper ; and who, having spent some years in the army of the first Napoleon, was a standing grievance to Jacqueline, who was a devoted Bourbonist, and who considered that his atrocious principles accounted for every evil that befel the place, from the scanty supply of milk yielded by a favourite cow, to the unexpected demise of a chicken attacked by the gapes.

Up till lately the good old curé had taken charge of Marie d'Estanville's reading, and her range of literature was extensive in its way. She knew Latin tolerably, and could write a pleasant little note to her dear old friend ; she had read and re-read every scrap of romantic poetry furnished by the d'Estanville library, and knew the history of her own country from beginning to end, and also that of other countries as taught by French historians ; firmly believed that the English had never gained a real

victory when opposed to her countrymen, and that the French were the only really brave and warlike nation under the sun. She adored her country, and felt quite inspired when, reading old tales of chivalric daring, she reflected that she was a descendant of these heroic characters ; but the old curé had been dead nearly six weeks when our story begins, and Madame d'Estanville was not inclined to make his successor so intimate, when she found that he was young, and not at all a favourable specimen of his order.

Marie d'Estanville was therefore thrown entirely upon her own resources ; she had no amusements and no distractions, and yet she never for one moment knew what ennui meant ; she was devoted to her mother, and when she was not reading or occupying herself in household matters she sat and built castles in the air, in which her mother was the invariable heroine ; and all the good things that were to be had if her dreams were realized were solely and entirely for that mother's benefit.

As she had grown up, one idea had grown with her growth and strengthened with her

strength—whatever trouble existed, whatever difficulties arose in the house, her mother must never know them ; Jacqueline had impressed this upon her from the time when she was a tiny child, and Marie, quick, sensitive, and imaginative, had learnt her lesson well.

She sat now wondering what result would happen to them from all this change at Ortan-sur-Mer, and rose in answer to a summons to her mother's room, smoothing her wavy hair with her little hand, and composing herself as she went, fearful lest any unwonted excitement in her manner should bring down a rebuke for her idle morning.

CHAPTER II.

MADAME D'ESTANVILLE was sitting in her own room—a room so different from the others in that overgrown house, that it came upon you with a sort of surprise. Everywhere else the lofty rooms spoke painfully of desolation and decay, the desolation and decay of poverty; poverty made more conspicuous by the traces of bygone wealth and splendour. The rooms and passages had still the remains of gilding, carving, and painting. On the walls one portion of a hero might be seen gazing out stupidly with an absurdly vacant expression, as if wondering where the rest of himself had gone: here and there the huge damp spots had obliterated all save a muscular arm or leg; a hand holding nothing waved with an assump-

tion of dignity at nothing ; pieces of really fine old tapestry hung almost in shreds ; white and gold chairs looked ghastly with torn and tattered damask hangings ; and even the floors, inlaid in different woods and kept scrupulously clean, were here and there warped with a damp that pervaded everything ; and their curled edges made treacherous traps, which might have caused Marie many a fall had she not known their geography so well.

But once in Madame d'Estanville's rooms everything was forgotten. Her bedroom and a small anteroom, long ago given up to Marie, opened into a pleasant large airy drawing-room, and the whole suite was done up in exactly the same style ; the walls were hung with a delicate chintz, in panels ; the wood was white, bordered with grey ; the hanging lamps were antique in shape and of silver, so were the looking-glass frames ; some exquisite little pictures were ranged round the walls ; ebony cabinets mounted in silver, beautiful pieces of china standing on delicately-carved étagères stood in the corners ; on inlaid tables were flowers arranged as only Marie could arrange them ; a softened light, / 4

throwing everything into that subdued tint which has so powerful an influence upon the temperament, combined to make the room one of the most perfect possible.

And Madame d'Estanville exactly suited it. Small, fair, delicate ; her white hair drawn off her face, and partially concealed by a little lace handkerchief, made her look very little older than she was (she was thirty-six) ; and in a faded black silk dress, that was worn with a grace many a queen might have envied, she looked exactly the personification of a grande dame of the old school. Every movement spoke the dignified ease of one long accustomed to command, and every gesture had the sort of quiet condescension that completely prevented any one from an approach to familiarity, and allowed her to be as kind as possible, since no kindness on her side rendered an encroachment probable.

She was a very dainty-looking little lady, as she sat there with a more thoughtful expression upon her face than was quite habitual ; and as Jacqueline moved about, doing the numberless little offices long habit had rendered so

essential to Madame's comfort, that shrewd personage connected the apparent thoughtfulness with a long letter received that morning by her mistress, and cogitated upon its probable contents.

"It will come out sooner or later," she said to herself, reading every turn of the countenance that she had known from a child; "let us wait with all patience for the enlightenment."

Having placed Madame's flacon—a certain book of devotions into which Madame looked if she was low-spirited—a small piece of work (which never advanced one flower towards completion), and a small silver handbell, all conveniently within Madame's reach, Jacqueline was leaving the room; she was turning the handle of the door, when Madame d'Estanville spoke: "I want to see Monsieur de Pendarves," she said. "Send some one with my compliments, or stay, I will write a note."

Jacqueline muttered to herself, "Everything will be burnt to a cinder, and that girl will have used a pound of butter;" but she was obliged to find the little blotting-book, and

everything else that Madame required before she could leave her.

Madame d'Estanville wrote a few lines in haste, and held out the note to Jacqueline. "Send somebody," she said, as if she had a whole troop of servants at her command; and Jacqueline answered quietly, "I will send Antoine," as if she was choosing him out of at least twenty retainers; "and I can tell Mademoiselle that Madame waits for her?"

"Yes," said Madame d'Estanville, mechanically. She was evidently preoccupied, and the light kiss proclaiming Marie's presence almost startled her. Marie sat down in her accustomed place—a low stool near her mother—and she opened her book, prepared to read the life of a holy martyr, whose sufferings did not affect her so painfully as they might have done, simply because, happily for her peace of mind, she had acquired the knack of reading aloud, dividing her mind entirely at the same moment from all knowledge of the subject under consideration; mechanically her voice would go on in the subdued key befitting Madame

d'Estanville's sense of what was decorous; and at the moment of supremest agony to the unhappy martyr, she was in thought assisting her favourite ancestors to defend the walls of a besieged city. It is not to be wondered at, under these circumstances, that poor Madame d'Estanville reproached her daughter with an indifference that much astonished her, and told her, often and often, that she did not read these terrible things with sentiment, as if she felt them.

But to-day there was to be no reading. Madame d'Estanville looked down on Marie's upturned face, and told her she was too much engrossed by news she had received that morning to listen to reading of any kind, and sat stroking the pretty head that leaned so lovingly against her knee, till at last tears came into her eyes, and she exclaimed suddenly, "Child I am so sorry! so sorry! but do you know that you are very ignorant?"

Marie's eyes opened a little. "I know nothing, my little mother," she said; "but that is because I am so very stupid."

"No," said Madame d'Estanville, impetu-

ously, "it is not that. It is my pride—Ah ! I see it now !"

"Mère chérie," began Maria, pleadingly, a little bewildered by so unusual an outburst from her mother ; but her mother stopped her ; "Yes," she said, "I found myself much poorer than I had been, much much poorer than I expected, and my pride would not allow me to live where you might have had the advantages befitting your station. My child, I refused the assistance of my relations, because they offered me that assistance, and poured angry reflections upon your father's conduct in the same breath. I was offered a house, but I refused it ; I preferred independence."

"You did right !" exclaimed Marie, with flashing eyes, "and though I do not know what other girls know perhaps, yet our good Father Moreau thought me not ignorant upon the whole, mother."

"You were his pupil," said Madame d'Estanville, sadly ; "you must remember that he thought very highly of you ; he loved you as his own child."

"Then there is Monsieur de Pendarves,

mother ; he does not think me ignorant, neither does Madame Biète ;” and Marie smiled pleasantly at her mother.

“Paints like an artist ; can speak, read, and write four languages ; dances, rides, and swims ; plays four instruments, and is never at a loss in any matter connected with history or geography ; can work like a milliner.” Poor Madame d'Estanville's thoughts were running on this sentence—part of the letter she had received that morning, and she uttered these words aloud.

Marie laughed merrily. “Oh ! mother,” she said, “never imagine I can equal all that, or that such a description will ever apply to me.”

Madame d'Estanville sighed. “Never mind,” she said, “give me your arm ; the sun is bright ; we will take a turn by the river till the luncheon is ready.”

Leaning on her daughter's arm, she moved slowly down the avenue, proclaimed herself fatigued after ten minutes had passed, and came back to her room in time to receive Jacqueline's announcement that “Madame was served.”

CHAPTER III.

ORTAN-SUR-MER had been for many centuries a quiet, unfrequented spot, accessible only by a narrow, steep, and ill-kept road, that wound its way up through the valley, passing the d'Estanville property.

The only strangers who resorted there were a few of the neighbouring families, who put up with such accommodation as they could find, in consideration of the healthy bracing air, the perfect retirement, and the very moderate prices.

But it so happened that a visitor in the neighbourhood coming there with a violent attack of dyspepsia, and returning comfortably free from that malady, imbibed so grateful a sense of its capabilities, that he never rested till he per-

suaded a capitalist to see it in his light. The place was written about. A very fashionable Parisian physician, not knowing what on earth to do with a very great lady, sent her there, more to be out of his way than anything else, and the fate of Ortan-sur-Mer was sealed.

A railway was made direct from Paris, and the secluded village awoke to a sense of its own fame, and found itself the centre of French fashionable life during three months of the year ; besieged by incessant application for room, after years of the most perfect seclusion and tranquillity. Houses sprang up as if by magic, for which the most exaggerated prices were asked and given ; Parisian hotel keepers came down and elbowed the old-fashioned hotels upon one side ; fabulous rents, fabulous hotel charges, astonished the quiet provincials ; and the old nobility living in their ancestral homes within its reach, who had viewed with mingled feelings this sudden invasion into their neighbourhood, found themselves utterly unable to cope with the now enormous expense of living ; and more than one of these families were obliged to sell or let their properties, and turn their

backs upon Ortan-sur-Mer, considerably richer in point of means, and poorer in spirit, than they had ever dreamed of being.

Certainly nothing could exceed the beauty of the place, or the many advantages it possessed. Ortan-sur-Mer originally stretched itself in single defile round the beautiful bay, which looked due south, and was sheltered by undulating hills wooded up to their very summit; whilst one or two valleys gave that outlet to the imagination speaking of things beyond, without which no view in the world is perfect.

The river that rushed past the Château d'Estanville, and already widened there, grew still larger as it neared the sea; and now a very beautiful bridge was thrown across it on the sands, and formed one of the many pretty things in the very pretty place.

The sands—wide, fine, and level—stretched in golden uniformity of colour along the beach; and when the sun was powerful, and the south wind too hot, a short walk over the hill to the north, or a longer one round the point by the sands, placed you, in a very short time, with the full sweep of the sea from the north-east; and

a refreshing wind, bracing, invigorating, and health-restoring, fanned you deliciously after the warmth on the other side, bearing towards you that indescribable smell of salt and seaweed that, once known, is longed for at intervals ever after.

But beautiful as it appeared even to the bilious eyes of those sent there in summer and autumn, to endeavour to shake off the pernicious effect of prolonged stomatic experiments, people who had so long tampered with their digestion that it had completely got the better of them at last, and who admired the place in a languid manner, and existed by the help of those yellow-coloured novels, which contain with few exceptions—if those who try to read them are to be believed—nothing either wholesome, interesting, or amusing; who did their ruralizing in impossible costumes, tight boots perched upon such high heels as to necessitate long canes for their support,—if it appeared lovely even to these; to be seen in full perfection, to know what it was in reality, it should have been seen in the lavish beauty of its spring tide, when the acacia-trees were in full bloom; when

every shade of green was marked and distinct ; when the orchards were a sheet of blossom, and the ground, studded with primroses and violets, made a gemmed carpet, trodden upon unheedingly by many wooden shoes, but all the same possessing a subtle influence, which prevents anything of natural beauty from being absolutely wasted, and gave incessant happiness to the dark-eyed Norman children, who made fantastic wreaths, and pretty nosegays, and learned to love "Le Bon Dieu" in their own imperfect way, through the medium of His handiworks.

The people at Ortan-sur-Mer were extremely pleased at the importance and fashion suddenly bestowed upon them, and bore with equanimity the prospect of those rich English families, who are to be found wherever money is to be spent ; and though these families were expected to grumble a great deal at the absence of "le comfort" in houses unsubstantial as cardboard houses in appearance, and little better in reality, yet they were to be made to pay prices which gave them every right to grumble "à volonté ;" and the spleen of an Englishman being a recog-

nized fact to the French mind, they were prepared to accept it, and allow it, as being as inseparable from an Englishman's character as his love of washing and his carpet bag.

It was in a street a little off the one main row of houses that an old-fashioned house stood, in the centre of a garden that boasted of pears and apples in abundance, greatly to the detriment of the vegetables.

It stood amongst its whitewashed and newly-decorated neighbours in the greyness of age and unimprovement. Something about the house, and something about the garden, was different from its surroundings; and when you entered the little paved court you were not surprised to see a soft English face of about forty years, and hear the English tongue.

Shrouded in the widow's cap, which to French people is an incessant subject of wonder, there was something particularly pleasing in Madame Biète's face. Except the bright blue eyes that lighted it up, the whole expression was tranquil, calm, and dignified; but every now and then a certain curl of a very pretty mouth revealed a spirit of fun and a sense of the ludicrous that

had evidently survived through the various passages of an eventful life.

She was not altogether pleased at the prospect of having her country people once more round her. She knew that a foreign watering-place might attract many who had good reason for wishing to leave their country for a time, from the pressure of a financial crisis; and she dreaded lest her country should through unscrupulous invaders come to be held in greater disrepute; but when prices rose she comforted herself—the class she dreaded were not likely to be attracted to a place where one mutton-chop, trimmed to an attenuated likeness of itself, sold for ten sous and even more.

It was a sunny morning, and the active little woman had got through all her morning's work; the little close kitchen range had its small bright saucepans simmering upon it; and the one girl who came in to do her rough work for a few hours every day was putting her finishing touches to the unrivalled polishing of the unused copper pans, when the postman presented a letter to her mistress.

Madame Biète had few correspondents left,

and the one who now favoured her with an epistle was no favourite apparently, for she sat with a look of annoyance upon her face, and Jeannette spoke twice before she heard her. "You have done? that is well. Yes, go now, by all means;" and Jeannette's round eyes got still rounder as she found herself dismissed without the usual scrutiny of her washing and tidying up.

"Of course they want something, or they would not have written." Madame Biète took up her work, and went on with it, till the over-boiling of a saucepan recalled her to her kitchen. She sat down to a dainty little meal, and had only just finished and put the things away when one of her French neighbours entered.

"Je ne vous dérange pas," she said, as she sat down, evidently prepared to unburden herself; and without waiting for an answer she began—

"The luck, the extraordinary luck of some people is really astonishing!" she said, with repressed indignation and irritation. Madame Biète's face expressed amusement.

“Meaning that something fortunate has occurred in your family?” she asked, quietly.

“Mine! no such thing: who would dream of good fortune in connection with me or mine? No; it is Madame Bayon who is of all women the most fortunate. I know, I *know*,” she repeated, very impressively—and she raised her forefinger in the air, and kept beating time with it as she spoke—“that her house costs her exactly twenty pounds a year. Well, what do you suppose has happened? You know her house?”

“Yes,” said Madame Biète, “a very large house a little way from the town—a very pleasant house, with a good view and a nice garden.”

“Bah!” said Madame Leroux, with a contemptuous shrug; “call that a very pleasant house! why it is the work of one servant going the messages; it is broiling work going up that hill; if you wanted ice it would be melted before it got there. People’s tastes differ; I do *not* call it a pleasant house.”

“Well,” said Madame Biète, “and this house, what has happened to it?”

“Madame Biète,” said Madame Leroux, solemnly, “I do assure you that what I am going to tell you is the perfect truth. I myself was so astonished, so bewildered when I heard it, that I would not believe it; but I am forced to believe the testimony of my eyes, not to speak of my ears. Well, I saw with my own eyes, in a letter that Madame Bayon showed me this morning, that she has let her house for three months at a rent—No; really I cannot come back from it! You must guess it.”

“A thousand francs a month,” suggested Madame Biète.

“Wrong, perfectly wrong,” answered her visitor; “that rent would be simply ridiculous, as you, Madame, know quite well; but the price given for this house—this house that only cost Madame Bayon five hundred francs—is three thousand francs a month! You quite understand—three thousand francs a month.” Madame Leroux paused for breath, and relieved her feelings by pulling her shawl tightly about her with a jerk that tested its capabilities.

“I am heartily glad to hear it,” said

Madame Biète, kindly. "Poor Madame Bayon ! she has had a great struggle with all those fine boys of hers. I am very glad she has got such a help."

"You may not be quite so pleased when you hear that Madame Bayon's fortune is to be made at the expense of an English lady, one of your compatriotes," said Madame Leroux, maliciously.

"Why not?" asked Madame Biète, calmly ; "if my country-people can afford to pay for any fancy they happen to have, I am very glad one so deserving as Madame Bayon should benefit by them."

"The shortsightedness of people is wonderful—quite astounding!" said Madame Leroux, angrily. "You know my apartment, every convenience under the sun ; well, this miladi, upstairs she comes ; she sniffs about, and her daughter worse still, and they open the windows : they refuse my rooms because of the impure air, the open drain, in the street. 'Madame,' I said, 'all you have to do if you dislike that drain is never to open your window ; it is quite simple.' But no, they were obstinate,

and my rooms are refused because Monsieur le Maire allows this street in which I live to be badly kept. I suffer because of Monsieur le Maire : c'est trop fort."

"Was the drain their only objection ?" asked Madame Biète, who knew by unpleasant experience that the street in question was very badly kept.

"There was a frivolous objection raised about the servants' rooms," said Madame Leroux ; "they objected to putting two women-servants in one room, and not having a sitting-room for the servants. I pointed out the great economy there would be in the arrangement I proposed : not one thing would they hear, but repeated it was not comfortable, as if it much matters for a few months if one's servants are comfortable or not." Madame Leroux fanned herself, and looked the picture of indignation.

"I wonder who it is that has taken Madame Bayon's house," said Madame Biète, musingly.

"I tell you the same miladi who looked at mine—Miladi Hall."

"I did not understand," said Madame Biète ; "they are very rich people, and I heard about

them to-day. My dear Madame Leroux, they have four servants, and—— no, your rooms would not have suited them.”

“Of course not,” said Madame Leroux, sarcastically ; “and about this house, I suppose you will let it also.”

“I have no intention of doing so,” said Madame Biète, quietly.

Madame Leroux again jerked her shawl, gave her bonnet a little hitch forward, shrugged her shoulders, and left Madame Biète to her own devices.

CHAPTER IV.

MADAME BIÈTE took up her letter and reperused it, with a look of supreme contempt upon her face. "When they want me, they remember my good qualities," she said half aloud, "the way of the world." Her letter was still in her hand, when a halting footstep sounded on the carpetless stair; a light tap at the door, and a figure entered, remarkable in every way. A slight, small, deformed woman with grey hair drawn off her face, eyes that were startling from their size and brilliancy, and a querulous, peevish-looking face, white and colourless even to the lips.

"I know I disturb you," she said, in a discontented voice; "I am always unlucky."

"You do not disturb me in the least; sit

down," said Madame Biète, kindly, pushing a comfortable low chair towards her visitor. "I was coming to see you."

"I knew it, I was sure of it, I said so!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Lombre, almost in a voice of triumph.

"What did you know? What were you sure of?" asked Madame Biète, very much astonished.

"You are going to let your rooms, of course; and mine will be at your service, of course, directly," said Mademoiselle de Lombre, half rising from her chair and speaking very fast.

Madame Biète looked at her reproachfully; "I am not going to let my rooms," she said, quietly.

"You are mad! you are insane!" said Mademoiselle de Lombre; "why those large rooms I occupy upstairs would bring you in a fortune. Do you know that rooms are letting for fabulous prices?"

"I am not going to let my house," said Madame Biète in the same quiet voice, and turning her blue eyes full upon her visitor.

"You are an angel," exclaimed Mademoiselle de Lombre, suddenly embracing Madame Biète; "to think of such a thing; no, such a sacrifice is barbarous, and I will not permit it."

"In my dark and dreary days," said Madame Biète, with a tenderness in her voice that showed how deep lay the current of feeling out of sight—"days when I almost prayed the light might never shine again for me, days when death had been so busy in my home; when fair-weather friends had left me, and I was lonely and sorrowstricken, one brave soul alone stood by me, and bid me not despair. With barely enough for herself she helped me, and gave me untiring sympathy and active assistance. Owing to her I floated out of those deep troubles, and gained my feet. Fortune turned, and friends followed fortune: does this one dear friend imagine that for the sake of money which I do not value I am capable of making any change in my arrangements that may affect her? What money could make up to me for your absence, chère Mademoiselle?" and the bright

blue eyes were moistened with unwonted feeling.

“You are an angel,” again said poor Mademoiselle de Lombre, with a sob in her voice, “and it is only my vile and wicked heart that sees everything in the blackest colours. Madame d'Estanville was as much to you as I was.”

“I do not forget her,” said Madame Biète, “but though I love her dearly the position was different; she was rich and powerful in those days. It cost her nothing to say, ‘Madame Biète is an English lady, and, my friend, do have lessons from her.’ You arranged everything, took me into your house and nursed me, bore with my terrible want of faith, and saved me from despair; then I recovered my money and we made a home here, and one thing after another has come to me, so that I am now rich enough for my requirements, and can help others who require help; and yet you imagine I would alter this!”

“And what were you going to speak to me about?” asked Mademoiselle de Lombre, after a moment's silence.

"About this letter," said Madame Biète, holding up the one she had received that morning. "I am asked by a relation to find a good French teacher for the son of a Lady Hall, who has taken Madame Bayon's house upon the hill. Like most English people, they are excessively particular about a good accent. I think," continued Madame Biète, with a look of amusement, "that I may safely recommend your accent."

"You are very good," said Mademoiselle de Lombre, despondingly, "but it will not do—it is impossible."

"No; then we must give it up," said Madame Biète, who knew her well, "and I will send to Mademoiselle Nouille."

"Mademoiselle Nouille; vous n'y pensez pas. My dear Madame, Mademoiselle Nouille really is a very stupid person, capable of teaching A B C to quite young children and (with the aid of Noel and Chapsal) grammar and analyse to older ones; but for a young man, who desires, for instance, to become acquainted with our literature——"

"It cannot be helped," said Madame Biète, in

a tone of resignation. "Since you will not undertake it, I am bound to think of Mademoiselle Nouille."

"Mademoiselle Nouille ! and you conscientiously say you like her accent : why she sounds all her finals with an affectation that is almost sublime !" and Mademoiselle de Lombre's eyes positively danced with indignation.

"What am I to do ?" asked Madame Biète, as if perplexed. "Madame Jouvanceau is very ignorant."

"And speaks like a German," interrupted Mademoiselle de Lombre ; "she has never recovered her Alsatian origin."

"Mademoiselle Nouille, then, I suppose it must be ; the masters are all so busy just now," said Madame Biète.

"No, rather than that I will teach him myself," said Mademoiselle de Lombre, having succeeded in putting herself in the position of obliging Madame Biète. "I do hope he will not be very stupid. How old is he ?"

"Twenty-one ; and six feet high, blond and amiable."

"Then he is *sure* to be stupid," exclaimed

Mademoiselle de Lombre ; “ a young giant and a monster of dulness. Good-bye, my dear Madame Biète : you will arrange the preliminaries for me ; good-bye.” And the small lame woman rose and left Madame Biète once more alone.

CHAPTER V.

MADAME BIÈTE was an Englishwoman, the daughter of a country clergyman of good family and good fortune. She was one of those warmhearted, enthusiastic, and impulsive people—rare enough in these days—not only warmhearted but large-hearted, accepting as her personal concern the sorrows and troubles of people among whom her lot in life was cast, and accepting all the anxieties and worries which it was in her nature to feel for those who thus became dear to her.

The quiet village in which she lived as a child was in one of the loveliest spots on the Devonshire coast. The old-fashioned rectory, nestling high up above the cliffs, and overlooking a sea view that was almost unequalled,

lived in Madame Biète's memory, as the home of one's childhood always does; against all reason and the very evidence of one's senses, everything was larger, finer, and utterly incomparable with the more prosaic impressions of after years.

But Madame Biète's father had been a man differing much from other men, and especially from other clergymen, in the days in which he had been rector of Studleigh-Coombe. A man of as warmhearted a nature as his child, he had thrown aside ambition, honours, everything that had been open to him for the sake of love. He had married a young, shy, ignorant girl, whose unchanging sweetness of temper and devotion to himself had made his home a paradise, and whose death took away all he cared for in life, except his child and his books.

All women reared exclusively by a man, and a man like old Mr. Harcourt, gain much and lose something, as compared with other girls. Miss Harcourt grew up unlike others, having a different standard of conventionality. Refined in mind, and taking far wider and more

unprejudiced views than most women, she was quite ignorant of the necessary wisdom all mothers teach their children intuitively; she respected the opinions of others too little, cared far too little how she offended the prejudices of others, and was much too ready to express her disapproval of things and people who held, according to her, such intensely narrow and mean views upon all subjects.

Like many another Frenchman of good family in those troubled times, Monsieur Biète de Constance had dropped his title and that part of his name by which he was best known, and had gone to Studleigh-Coombe with letters of introduction to Mr. Harcourt; he had established himself in the village, and assisted the devoted father in the education of his child.

Only ten years younger than Mr. Harcourt in reality, the vivacity of his disposition made the difference appear much more; and it was with the most perfect satisfaction that Mr. Harcourt saw his well-dowered daughter married to a man whose heart lay open to him, and whom he had grown to love almost as his

own younger brother. Then came the days of trial and of trouble. Mr. Harcourt died, and the family living went to his cousin, and poor Madame Biète saw the pleasant home improved and pulled about, and at last could bear it no longer. Her relations, who had always affected to consider Mr. Harcourt "odd," now talked of his actual imbecility.

The fact of allowing his only daughter, with fifteen thousand pounds, to marry a man whose sole means of subsistence amounted to about a hundred a year, of no family, evidently showed something was wrong; and the cousin, who was bound to pay this money, began to show, or try to show, by means of a court of law, that the will had been made at a time when old Mr. Harcourt was actually childish; but he lost his cause; the trial having dragged through the most wearisome length, proved triumphantly that seldom had old age retained so long all its acuteness and vigour; his few letters to his son-in-law proved the strong affection he had for him, and a complete success resulted to Monsieur and Madame Biète.

But a success that came too late. A severe

cold caught in the English winter had not left Monsieur Biète when spring came, and the devoted wife, leaving all behind her, found herself at Ortan-sur-Mer, with the glittering sea reminding her of her English home, her husband lying dead before her, a few francs in her hand, uncertainty confronting her, and not one friend or face she had ever seen before.

But it is not in the French nature to stand by and see a position like this without helping and showing sympathy. Madame d'Estanville had known and liked Monsieur Biète in her earlier days, and came forward at once so soon as she understood his widow's position ; and Mademoiselle de Lombre, who happened to live opposite the little hotel where the Biètes had taken refuge, had simply insisted upon doing all the crushed and sorrowstricken widow could not do, little dreaming the comfort and freedom from anxiety she was securing for herself in after days.

To no one did Madame Biète speak of the trial going on, or of her expectations. She chose to be accepted for herself alone, and rejoiced the more when she found not only

that she was warmly greeted on all sides for her husband's sake, but that she had, in circumstances of the greatest distress, made friends for herself. Then when fortune was secured to her, her gratitude took shape and form. She bought her roomy house, installed Mademoiselle de Lombre in some of its pleasantest rooms, and received from her the modest rent which she allowed her to pay in order that she might feel independent.

For herself, she did not alter one bit the life she had been living these last few months. She still kept her one servant for a few hours a day, saw to the arrangement of her little dinner, and lived as quietly as possible. And this enabled her to do what her generous nature found comfort and satisfaction in doing to those around her.

The beauty of the place in which she had found a refuge was precisely the sort of beauty she loved from association. She spent hours walking far and fast over the sands. She lived a sort of double life. She was cheerful, pleasant, shrewd outwardly—taking interest in everything going on around her—but her

happiest hours were those when she went off by herself to hear the voices of those she had loved and lost coming back to her in the varying murmurs of the sea.

The blessing of such a woman is great everywhere, and was soon recognized. Of course Madame Leroux, and two or three spirits like herself, cavilled and found fault occasionally, spoke of English influence, sneered at English fastidiousness, and doubted Madame Biète's wisdom. But Madame Biète was loved as few are loved, by an overwhelming majority. What mattered it that she was childless, and had no home ties? there was not a child at Ortan-sur-Mer that did not connect her name with everything pleasant; not a little face that did not brighten at her approach; not a man, woman, or child in the place that could honestly say, "I have been in distress—real distress—and have found Madame Biète wanting." And the consciousness of this filled up her life, and gave her a settled feeling of calm and happiness; and after an active and trying day, spent in persuading and perhaps reproving, Madame Biète would sit down with books,

hallowed to her by the touches of husband and father, and linger lovingly over passages that renewed remembrance of them, resigned, hopeful, and not utterly sad.

While the trial was going on, her relations, foreseeing poverty, and delighted with the first opportunity they had found of speaking their mind, had addressed letters of remonstrance and reprobation to her, which she had very wisely left unanswered, thus depriving any quarrel of the two sides necessary to its existence. When the result proved to be in her favour, she left unanswered the letters of congratulation then addressed to her, and, except when money was wanted, she was left to the quietness and peace she found at Ortan-sur-Mer.

But now that Ortan-sur-Mer had become famous, and its prices extravagant—now that it was a very fashionable place, Madame Biète's relations took an entirely new view of her position.

A cousin living in an out-of-the-way village in Normandy was not a relation to be quoted, but a cousin living in a place where none but

millionaires could exist became immediately some one who reflected credit on the family ; and when Ortan-sur-Mer was discussed, people hitherto ignoring Madame Biète's existence referred to her pleasantly, and quoted " my cousin " as a reason why they should know much more about the place than other people.

This is how, through a mutual connection, Lady Hall was made known to Madame Biète, though she determined for the present to take no notice of the appeal she had received, and neither called upon them nor took any trouble, except sending Mademoiselle de Lombre to offer her services as French teacher, with a certificate from herself as to her superiority.

CHAPTER VI.

LADY HALL, the tenant who was to pay so high a rent to Madame Bayon, had only one son and one daughter. But judging by the prominence given by friends and acquaintances to Anne Hall, and her sayings and doings, you might have imagined not only that her spirit was the ruling spirit of the house, but that she possessed an amount of talent that fairly entitled her to it.

Nothing could have been farther from the truth.

Anne Hall ruled the house simply from having one of those rampant, overbearing tempers that forces everything gentler than itself into passive submission.

Lady Hall was one of those sweet-tempered,

easy natures to whom the resignation of her own will was no effort. Married very young to a man who had that frightful element in domestic life, a temper, she had passed the earliest portion of her married life in a perpetual effort to make things smooth.

So long as the spirit of Sir Samuel was kept calm, nothing signified to her. He died when Anne was about fourteen, and his mantle unfortunately descended to his daughter with amplifications.

Like most of these quiet and gentle people, Lady Hall had, in reality, plenty of calm good sense, and this very attribute enabled her to see the wisdom of not raising Anne's antagonism unless she wished to be embarked in a series of petty conflicts with her daughter. Anne loved power, Lady Hall loved peace: to gain her end she sacrificed all else without a pang. But those people who are always so capable of managing the affairs of all their neighbours, judging, as they only could do, superficially, considered that Anne's self-assertion and extreme dogmatism were in consequence of not having been properly repressed and kept down from

childhood. As a baby her self-will ought to have been checked, and her pap withheld till her infantine will had been subdued; then Lady Hall might have had a chance.

But Anne's temper was not one of those quick, hasty tempers that often accompany a warm and loving heart: her temper was simply the most trying that can possibly be conceived.

She was not hasty, she was resentful; her wrath, suppressed at first, gathered strength minute after minute; and you were innocently unaware of having given offence till you saw the corners of her mouth go down, and a black cloud settle upon her hard face; then, when the wrath had been smouldering till it grew frightful in its vehemence, it exploded, and a scene with Anne Hall was not a thing to forget.

She would rather have died than have relieved herself, as less well-regulated people might have done, by slamming a door. In her wildest and most furious moments her lips quivered and turned white, not red, as did her face, and her whole countenance, from the drooping corners of her mouth to the eyelids that followed suit, became rigidity itself. She

was, however, much too superior a person to choose to be considered thoroughly ill-tempered, so she was invariably "ill" when these fits came on, and her tender-hearted little mother got positively uneasy about her many a time, and Anne's delicacy (though no one could give it a definite name) became as much an institution and a recognized thing to poor Lady Hall's mind, as "dear Anne's great good sense," a phrase dinned into Lady Hall's ears by most people, and which became a stock mode of expressing Anne's right to make herself generally disagreeable.

She was a girl that might have been different had she seen more of the world; but the limited society dependent upon her humour kept her as smooth as possible by deferring to her on all occasions, and this gave her an air of pretension, and a deliberateness of manner infinitely amusing to outsiders.

The natural consequence of this excessive reliance upon herself and upon her own judgment was that it narrowed her in every way. She would not take the opinion of others about any subject under the sun; she saw no single

good thing in any one whom she could not patronize, or who did not choose to agree entirely with all she said, and yet no one in reality valued truth theoretically more than she did ; no one prided herself more upon being honest and true, and no one would have been more astonished than she would have been had she been enabled to see that refusing to accept more than she could see herself, limiting her opinion to a standard created by herself, forced her over and over again into a false position and errors of judgment.

Her brother Sam, who was four years younger than herself—she was twenty-five—had grown up with the family notion of Anne's ill-health and great superiority in point of sense, but times with him were beginning to change. Easy and sweet-tempered as he was, he could not always be expected to bow to Anne's decision about books, people, and things : it was all very well for Lady Hall to come home enchanted with a sermon that had touched her heart, and who yet allowed Anne to pull it to pieces, and to prove to her that no one gifted with the smallest discrimination could admire

it at all. It was all very well for his mother to give her opinion into Anne's keeping, and to admire and blame as she chose. Sam, in his own way facile and easy, was also honest, and if he liked a thing he said so, and stuck to it like a man; therefore Anne was driven to lamenting frequently over Sam's limited intelligence, and to receive any opinion he expressed with scornful disparagement.

Nothing by the way, really, that grows up out of idleness, thoughtlessness, and the wish to show, or try to show to others a superiority affected by finding fault, is very much more mischievous in its tendency than a habit of criticising every sermon we hear, as if we went to hear only a masterpiece of English composition, or some lecture in which the way in which it is put before us, the refinement of the English, and the beauty of the style forms its greatest attraction. No habit in the world requires less actual talent than the habit of finding fault: criticism is perhaps a thing that a person without one idea in his head can become an adept in; but though this is a truth that is universally recognized, people are a little apt to be led or

influenced by a disparaging remark ; and it would be well sometimes if more would think of this and reflect upon the probable effect of their words before uttering them.

Many a humble and gentle soul, struck if only by a sentence that applies to them particularly, has all its comfort destroyed by being told that the sermon was weak, trashy, and in roundabout words that they are pitifully weak-minded for having discovered one single thing to like in it. But after all, this is very little to some people ; all who reverently bury their faces before the sermon do not pray that God will bless it to them, and enable them to benefit by it, as far as may be.

A good voice, a reverent manner, earnestness, reality, a refined accent and great eloquence—if all these are within any one's reach, let them give God thanks, and remember that according to what they receive will be expected of them ; but let those who have within their reach only *one* of these things make the most of it. If honestly looked for, beauty, something good, something to remember, may be found in the dullest sermon that ever was preached—

something that in a day of sorrow or of trial may rise up to comfort.

As about sermons, so about books with Anne Hall; if she discovered no charm in a book she was positively angry if any one else ventured to like it. In short, her judgment was infallible.

The death of her father had helped, of course, to give her this position of domination in her house, and Lady Hall and Sam found themselves now in France and at Ortan-sur-Mer, because Anne, having read a story where the scene was laid in France, uprooted them all to fulfil the wish she conceived to travel.

Lady Hall was the type of an Englishwoman fast becoming obsolete in these days. All her life had been spent within a certain radius of London, and she was essentially and selfishly fond of those comforts that were habitual to her.

Her husband—knighted for having taken up an address to the crown on some important occasion—had left her one thousand a year, with a reversion to Anne, and to his son a

pretty place and three thousand a year ; but his death effected no change in their mode of life—at all events had not yet done so, for Sam was devoted to his mother, and they continued, very naturally, to live together. A long puff in a morning paper had decided Anne in favour of Ortan-sur-Mer, and there they arrived—Sam effectually guarded by the precautions of a public school against the knowledge of any language but his own, Lady Hall having learnt French and forgotten it, and Anne knowing it grammatically, thinking she spoke it perfectly, and doing so in reality tolerably correctly with the assistance of the strongest possible English accent.

The mutual friend who had introduced Lady Hall to Madame Biète's notice knew the latter much too well to do so in a way which left her no option of refusing to make the acquaintance should she dislike doing so ; and, indeed, the letter was written under a protest from Anne, and more to soothe poor Lady Hall's feelings about finding herself "a stranger in a strange land," than with any view of its being ultimately

useful. Between Anne Hall, full of self-confidence, and determined, if possible, to avoid making this acquaintance, and Madame Biète's distaste for knowing any new people, there was not much prospect of great cordiality.

CHAPTER VII.

MADAME D'ESTANVILLE was sitting in her pleasant room; the sun was off it now, the blinds were all up, and the windows, open all the way to the ground, were thrown back, and the whole of the beautiful view lay before her.

Accustomed to it as she was, there was always the same fresh appreciation for it—she could always see fresh beauties; and as she sat now, with her eyes wandering over it, she noted each thing that made it so lovely almost as though it was presented to her for the first time—the undulating ground, broken up with its varying shades of green into masses, through which here and there the river, like a thread of silver, showed itself; beyond, a spire or two, and quite in the distance a broad line of light,

that melted into a golden haze, and proclaimed the vicinity of the sea.

The cawing of the rooks—the sort of home feeling they always give—took her in fancy to her childish days, when coming over to the old château was considered a grand fête—when she had dreamed dreams of future greatness, and sat under those very trees with Monsieur d'Estanville—she, a demure child of seven, admiring him ; and he, grown up and twenty-three, with irreproachable legs and diamond buckles in his shoes ; and he had kissed her hand, and she had thought the perfection of human happiness would be becoming Madame d'Estanville. Then, after ten years of absence, while she had cherished his likeness, she remembered what a chill she had felt when she had found herself really engaged to her former hero, who had in the interim grown positively ugly, acquired a fondness for snuff, a white face and a very red nose, his diamond buckles even having turned to paste.

She had married him all the same, because family arrangements required it ; but, as she confessed to herself, and sometimes to Jacque-

line, it had been quite without sentiment or enthusiasm. One grand resource she had—one amusement that formed an endless and admiring topic of conversation between Marie and herself. Like Madame de Sévigny, Madame d'Estanville wrote letters innumerable; unlike Madame de Sévigny, her letters contained no pictures of life as it then was. Seeing scarcely any one, knowing marvellously little of what was going on round her, she invented various romantic adventures, which (as she impressed on her daughter's mind frequently enough) made her letters more original than those of Madame de Sévigny. "There is nothing wonderful," she would say, "in simply writing about people and things—real people and real things; the great merit lies in inventing all that I say;" and Marie dutifully agreed with her, and considered her letters infinitely beyond those of the witty and pleasant mother of Madame de Grignan. To complete the difference, her mother and herself had never been parted even for a day, therefore it was difficult to write as if the cherished daughter was out of sight.

Some of these letters were lying before Madame d'Estanville now, when Monsieur de Pendarves was announced.

Monsieur le Comte de Pendarves was a tall, soldierly-looking man, with a good figure and a handsome face—a face bronzed with the exposure to sun and wind in many a distant climate.

The beauty of his countenance in reality consisted most in its expression; he had a look of thoughtfulness and goodness, and there was something both chivalric and tender in his manner towards Madame d'Estanville. She met him with outstretched hands, gave a little sigh when she glanced at his signs of mourning, and sat down, carefully covering up the letters she had been looking over.

“You are so good to come at once,” she said, with a grateful look at him; “but I can always depend upon you. What should I have done without your advice all these weary years?”

Monsieur de Pendarves smiled. “I am glad it has been of use to you; it is the more extraordinary, as I do not remember

one single instance in which you have followed it."

Madame d'Estanville laughed; she could not deny that she generally asked anxiously for advice that she very rarely followed, after the fashion of many.

"You are severe," she said, "but the truth is that your advice does help me to make up my mind; and"—she continued, with a sudden change of voice—"I am stupid to laugh when I am so sad. I laugh when I could weep in reality."

"What has happened to vex you?" asked Monsieur de Pendarves, kindly.

"I have had a letter," said Madame d'Estanville, trying to keep down feelings that were evidently beginning to overpower her. "I do not believe one word of it—not a word—and I do not think there is any use answering it; however, I should like you to read it."

Monsieur de Pendarves took from her hands the letter she had received that morning; a look of real concern crossed his face as he read it. "Monsieur le Comte de Belleville is your cousin," he said at length, looking up without restoring the letter.

"I do not believe one word he says," she exclaimed, vehemently, "not one word. My cousin—yes, he is my cousin—but what has that to do with it? I do not believe it."

"Which part do you not believe?" asked Monsieur de Pendarves, kindly; "that part about this very accomplished young lady, or the debt which Monsieur de Belleville mentions?"

"Oh! about the accomplishments, I do not doubt that for one moment," said Madame d'Estanville, in a different tone of voice; "and, by-the-way, let us talk over this proposal. I am to receive this young lady here, who is of so independent a spirit she insists upon paying for her board, and who knows everything, and she is to teach Marie everything. Well, Monsieur de Pendarves, why do you smile? I insist upon knowing why you smile."

"Because you accept as truth all Monsieur de Belleville says of the young lady, and you will not believe him on the other question."

"Because the one may be true and the other is impossible," said Madame d'Estanville, solemnly.

Monsieur de Pendarves kept silence.

"I know what you are going to say—I forbid you to say it," and Madame d'Estanville raised her hand. "Well, why do you not speak?" she cried, after waiting a moment or two.

"When you command silence how can I break it?" said Monsieur de Pendarves, demurely.

"I only forbid you to say what I did not wish to hear," answered Madame d'Estanville.

"Which almost comes to the same thing," observed Monsieur de Pendarves. "Well, chère Madame, and about this young lady?"

"I want her to teach some of these talents—some of these accomplishments to Marie," she said; "Marie is so ignorant, she knows nothing."

A very pleasant smile passed over the handsome face of Monsieur de Pendarves.

"Take care," he said; "you do not know this young lady. She may be—I will not say is—the very last companion you may wish for your daughter. Ignorant! I do not call her ignorant."

"Well, she is terribly romantic," said Madame d'Estanville, plaintively, "and that is a terrible thing for a young girl."

"I do not think so, but I am perhaps a little romantic too," said Monsieur de Pendarves, with a little sigh.

"I assure you, my dear friend, my daughter's views on the subject of a possible marriage are as different from mine as light from day," said Madame d'Estanville, impressively.

"Probably; do you forget how different your education was, how different a life——"

Something in his tone made Madame d'Estanville look at him earnestly: she could not quite understand him.

"Do you wish your daughter to be as indifferent as some about her future fate? If she marries, surely you wish her to love her husband?" said Monsieur de Pendarves, earnestly.

"Properly, with the proper person, when the proper time comes," said Madame d'Estanville, gravely. "I will own to you," she said, with a little deprecating movement of her hands, "that I often regret I did not care

about mine much—I may say at all—till he died, poor man, when it became right to regret him: I think if I had loved him I should have been spared much unhappiness. It was his nose,” she added, gravely, “that caused me the most unhappiness, especially during the first years of my married life. You remember it was monstrous in point of size. Now if I had been in love with him, you know, its size would have been a matter of indifference to me, and I might—I do not say I would—but I might have wished Marie to resemble him even in that.”

“You might, certainly,” answered Monsieur de Pendarves, hardly able to keep his gravity.

“And, on the contrary, I made myself miserable at the very idea of such a thing,” said Madame d'Estanville, “and I used to watch Marie’s nose so intently that I actually thought I saw it growing. Now, of course, as I said before, I should have been spared all this, and I might have been a very happy woman if only I had had a little love to begin with.”

“Possibly,” said Monsieur de Pendarves, who

however, having a vivid recollection of the dissipated habits and reckless extravagance of the late Monsieur d'Estanville, could not imagine his wife being a happy woman.

"Well," continued Madame d'Estanville, with a little sigh, "to turn to the subject before us. I shall take no notice of my cousin's letter, so far as it relates to Monsieur d'Estanville's *supposed* debt, but I shall open my arms to this young girl. I feel sure she is all my heart can wish for, as a clever, highly-accomplished companion to Marie."

"I think you had much better think it over," said Monsieur de Pendarves; "Monsieur de Belleville's is evidently merely a copy of what he has been told about her—she may be——"

"You are utterly without heart—you are as cold-blooded as a frog," said Madame d'Estanville, half angrily. "Now hold your tongue; I will not hear a word; I shall write to-day—now—this moment."

"And my advice," said Monsieur de Pendarves, laughing.

"She shall come, and I—I who speak to you—

will take the consequences. And about that ridiculous assertion of a debt being still owing——”

“You must wait till the claim is made,” he answered, rising as he spoke.

“You are quite right,” Madame d'Estanville answered, already fingering her pen ; and hardly waiting for him to leave the room, she drew her writing materials towards her, ready to begin a letter in which every sentence should be quite equal to those indited by her great model.

CHAPTER VIII.

MONSIEUR DE PENDARVES rode slowly and thoughtfully home—to a home where the recent death of his mother had left no one to welcome him. A pretty place, from the judicious arrangement of the gardens—depending for its prettiness more upon the interference of mankind than the natural beauty of situation belonging to the Château d'Estanville: the house—Maison Croix Blanche, called for short, La Croix—was one of those white houses to be found all through France, and in some parts of Scotland, as if they had all been built by one hand—the centre completely concealed from the sun by the projecting wings, forming three sides of a square, and looking north, as the great object was to have cool rooms in the

summer time; people—very few people at least—thought of living in the country except under the influence of the warm sun and summer weather.

But old Madame de Pendarves, an invalid for years, had never left it since the fatal day upon which her husband, driving her in his reckless fashion, had thrown her out of the carriage, and had lost his life by being pitched out afterwards. Some injury to the spine had kept her almost a cripple all the rest of her life, missing society less when her only child, returning from foreign service, came to devote himself to her.

All the small rooms looking south at the back of the house had been gradually appropriated and fitted with everything calculated to make life pleasant to the mother he idolized; the garden was kept up to a pitch of perfection, and stocked with every choice plant that could be planted there, and was full of pleasant recollections to the master of La Croix—sunny days, when, half lying in the Bath chair in which she spent so much of her time, she would discuss the probable effect to be pro-

duced by making a young magnolia change places with something else, or express her delight at the unexpected beauty of a hitherto ungrateful plant.

At first, with the supreme selfishness of an invalid whose egotism was fostered and encouraged by being made the centre of everything in the house, Madame de Pendarves had gone through agonies of dread about her son's probable marriage; but year after year passed on; Monsieur de Pendarves was on active service, was mentioned in despatches, was decorated, returned frequently to spend short holidays with his mother, and as yet the prospective daughter-in-law had never even been hinted at.

Matters stood thus when Madame de Pendarves' last illness came on: it was not till then, when the certainty of her own approaching departure put everything in a new and different light, that the consciousness of her own great selfishness flashed upon her: she was leaving her son alone, and he was less fitted than most men for such a life: with his warm and loving heart, life without womanly companionship would indeed be dreary. She was struck with remorse,

and the more when she reflected that the habits of his life, the tone of mind she had fostered, rendered it almost impossible for him to find his happiness with many. If he married now, it must be no *mariage de convenance*, he must love and be beloved, else the void would be filled with misery instead of happiness.

With all the keen-sightedness of a mother, whose enforced tranquillity of body rendered her keenness of vision almost a gift, Madame de Pendarves saw in the graceful, childish daughter of the only friend she had, qualities that had even then the power of attracting Monsieur de Pendarves. Marie d'Estanville, with her enthusiastic admiration for the old heroes, her face glowing with animation, as some of the old poems struck a key-note that found in her heart a respondent chord, how lovely she was! and if her son would try to win her then, before the world had spoiled her and rendered her self-conscious, would he not have success, and his future life be one long-continued spell of happiness?

All unconscious of this new form of selfishness, she spoke to her son. His back was to-

wards her, and she did not see the flush that passed over his face, but his voice had a vibration of sadness, as he answered, "You are dreaming, mother; I am forty-five and Marie a child not yet seventeen, and younger even than that in everything."

"I do not say yet," she answered; "only try to win her love now; some of the happiest marriages have been where a disparity of years existed. Before she sees gay and foolish young lovers about her, create an interest for yourself in her heart. She would make you very happy, my son."

"And her happiness?" said Monsieur de Pendarves, sadly. "Mother, do you believe it possible I should do such a selfish thing? do you think I would take advantage of her childish innocence and ignorance, and make her fancy she likes me, without knowing what may be before her, if she sees something of the world? No! if I won her love in this way I should not value it, and should hate myself for having been so cruelly selfish."

"You are so handsome and so good," said the mother, looking at him with glistening

eyes ; “ even supposing she goes into the world, if she is what I believe her to be, you will gain and not lose by contrast.”

“ You are my mother,” he answered, gently, and then he would change the conversation.

These words, however, would still occasionally come into his mind : every time he saw that child, as he still called her, she twined herself closer and closer round his heart, a heart singularly free hitherto from all passion. All the little familiarities which she so innocently showed him were inexpressibly sweet to him, telling himself all the time that it was a foolish madness, and yet dwelling upon every look and gesture till he felt bewildered with this new and violent passion.

He rode up to his own front door and rang once, twice—no answer but the shrillest expositions in the shrill voices of the servants, sobs, and scoldings.

With the natural irritation of a master who is unable to obtain attention in his own house, or admittance at his own front door, Monsieur de Pendarves rode round to the side of the house, where a covered passage led to the

kitchen. The dairymaid, a rosy-cheeked girl called Babbette, was leaning against the wall in the passage, her apron twisted beyond recognition into a kind of rope, her red arms and redder hands held above her head, the picture of dairymaid desolation, her eyes swollen and tears still rolling over her face.

"Babbette, what is the matter? and what a noise you are making."

Babbette, evidently charmed to be able to attack somebody, rushed to the kitchen door—"Here, Jean! Andrieu! Baptiste! voyons donc! here is Monsieur le Comte, furious, positively furious, and enraged; he has rung, he has despaired: his horse and himself to be kept waiting like that!"

Every one ran out, and every one began to talk at once. "Now for it," said poor Monsieur de Pendarves, as he saw a tall bony woman advancing from the kitchen, clearing her throat.

"What a noise you are making," said Monsieur de Pendarves; "it is like coming into a nest of magpies; why do you all talk at once? and what has happened?"

Marie, the elderly woman, who had nursed him as a child, and had been his mother's right hand, advanced with a look of injured dignity. She was a woman gifted above other women with volubility of tongue. She was one of those faithful servants who will allow no one to do anything, to know anything, or say anything but herself. Excessively stingy of her own means, and saving of those of her master, she had always retained a certain dominion over Monsieur de Pendarves, which had considerably increased since his mother's death. Indeed, he felt so helpless, opposed to the feminine element in his household, that he was glad when differences of opinion occurred to make a compromise as soon as possible.

"Monsieur wishes to know what has happened? Monsieur shall be gratified. Babbette, hold your tongue (Babbette had not said a word); do you suppose that Monsieur has nothing to do but listen to your chatter? go to your dairy. Andrieu, take Monsieur's horse round; Jean, I'll box your ears if you are not more active. Monsieur is not aware that I sent Babbette to market to-day, being

utterly unable to go myself because of the mattresses, it was an affair of conscience with me and, as Monsieur knows I am conscientiousness itself not that I cannot trust old Variole and his wife who are here unpicking and carding the wool. I do not for a moment believe that these worthy people would take so much as a shred still I choose to be here being the first time I have been the responsible person in the house, during the mattress cleaning and being, as I said before, conscientiousness itself"—here she was forced to stop and take breath. Monsieur de Pendarves, knowing by experience that the only way to arrive at a faint understanding under one hour's talk was letting her run on till she could run on no longer, said merely, "Well."

"But it is not well at all," said Marie, "anything but well. Babbette is the most ungrateful and evil-disposed girl that it is possible to conceive. After the black dresses Monsieur gave us if she had a heart which of course I know she has not got or a conscience, which indeed everybody knows she is utterly without she would have forbidden herself from an action

which must be condemned by all right-thinking people and the ingratitude! to think of the times without number that I have boxed her ears of the trouble she has given me of the scoldings she has had morning noon and night I have been after her. I have never left her alone and this is the reward I get; it is past belief."

"What has Babbette done?" inquired Monsieur de Pendarves.

"Gone and engaged herself to an English family!" screamed Marie, balancing herself in an indescribable way, first upon her heels and then upon her toes, in her great excitement.

"But as she gives you so much trouble, it is the best thing she could do, is it not?"

"And the cows!" screamed Marie; "and the cleaning! and the butter! how am I to reconcile the cows to a new hand? they are like children with a new nurse; and the new one has a vixenish English temper and suffers from low spirits like her country people and will not give down her milk unless to Babbette then the cleaning—that girl she loves hard work, it's play to her she will wash me out

the dairy floor before you can turn round and she washes the dishes with an astonishing celerity and hardly ever breaks anything I cannot replace her she knows that. Her place is here; she will be thrown away in an English family; with six other servants she will be ruined; she will have nothing to do but sit and comb her hair all day long. It is ridiculous! and this is not all; Babbette declares she must go now—to-day—this moment; she tore off her kitchen apron—she threw it down—‘Let me go!’ she said; ‘I go now!’ It is infamous! and Monsieur does not see the harm; that girl, that washer-up of dirty plates, goes and doubles her value to these English people. ‘Give me fifteen pounds,’ she said; ‘fifteen pounds.’ Monsieur takes it in; Monsieur clearly understands. Oh, I cannot come back from it all; I am suffocated!”

“Marie,” said Monsieur de Pendarves, “you must be more reasonable. You cannot expect that Babbette is to prefer hard work and hard words, small wages and a dull life, to living in plenty with little to do. Life is changing round us; the opening of the railway, and the

arrival of some rich English families will of course make service more expensive, and everything dearer; you told me 'living was already more expensive,' yourself."

"It is frightful," said Marie, energetically.

"But it tells both ways; you got nearly double for the butter yesterday."

"Butter is not everything," said Marie; "and the English, knowing nothing whatever of proper cooking, use scarcely any of it. Why do they come? If they have such splendour and comfort at home, why come here to disturb our tranquillity and raise our prices?"

"Some come for change of air and scene; some to learn the language or teach it to their children," answered Monsieur de Pendarves; "they like the climate."

"I should think they did," answered Marie; "any I have seen look like unripe apples, so white; and every one knows they never see the sun at all in their miserable country; they have nothing but fogs and colds in the head, and I hope to goodness they will take Babbette there, and show her what their detestable country really is."

The clattering of a horse's hoofs here interrupted the voluble housekeeper, and she went herself to see what was the matter. It was an express from Madame d'Estanville. Monsieur de Pendarves was directed to go over directly ; something had happened. The note, written by Marie, was worded so as to convey the impression, clear enough to Monsieur de Pendarves, that in seeing him, half their anxiety, whatever it was, would be over.

So, for the second time that day, Monsieur de Pendarves, with mingled feelings, made his way to the Château d'Estanville, not calmly or leisurely, but spurring his horse to a speed that reminded him of old times. Without pausing to do more than fasten his horse's bridle to the heavy knocker, he entered hastily and unannounced the room in which he had left Madame d'Estanville but a short time before.

CHAPTER IX.

MADAME D'ESTANVILLE was lying on her sofa, and Marie, bewildered and frightened, was sitting beside her bathing her temples. She gave a smile of the most perfect confidence when Monsieur de Pendarves entered, and left the room.

Madame d'Estanville started up. Her face was so white, her expression so sad, that Monsieur de Pendarves felt something real had occurred to trouble her.

"Ah, dear friend!" she said, stretching out her hand in her excitement, and pushing him into a chair; "I have just had a letter forwarded to me from—where do you think?—d'Occtrung—my own old home, the house where I used to live; and this house, it seems

now, is in the possession of my greatest enemy !”

Monsieur de Pendarves started. “ Old Maître is dead, is he not ?” he asked.

“ Yes ; but his son—his son lives ; lives to be my destruction. See !” she said, as with hands that trembled from her excitement, she showed a letter she had received.

It was dated from d'Occtrung, and was the claim alluded to by Monsieur de Belleville in his letter that morning. It was a claim which (if just and enforced) meant ruin to the unhappy lady it was sent to. It was a claim on the château and property of d'Estanville, said to have been granted in payment of a debt of honour. If the papers were real copies of the documents said to exist, it was a valid claim, and poor Madame d'Estanville and her daughter were actually penniless.

Monsieur de Pendarves read over very attentively every line of the papers sent with the letter. The letter itself was worded almost abjectly, and stated that this claim had been withheld by the express wish of Monsieur Jules Maître of d'Occtrung, and that he had

requested now that a year should be given to Madame d'Estanville to enable her to meet it without inconvenience.

“Without inconvenience !” said poor Madame d'Estanville, bitterly ; “knowing, as he does, that, owing to the rascality and wickedness of his own father, we have only what enables us to live as we do. If this is true I am homeless, and I and my child must work for our bread.”

“It may not be true,” said Monsieur de Pendarves, who was only too much afraid that it might prove a fact.

But he was almost sorry he had suggested this when he saw the eagerness with which poor Madame d'Estanville seized upon this hope. All the time too, one thought, from which he resolutely turned away, kept forcing itself before him. Marie dowerless, homeless, penniless—would she share his home ? The very idea gave a vibration to his voice, and Madame d'Estanville, mistaking his agitation for compassion and sympathy, thanked him so gratefully. Alas ! he felt as if he had no right to her thanks. Any-

thing for Marie was so pleasant and happy a feeling.

"If I were you I should forward these papers to Monsieur Morin," said Monsieur de Pendarves, "through Monsieur de Belleville; let their truth be tested; this is work for a man of business."

"True," said Madame d'Estanville; "and I can, at the same moment, express to my cousin my conviction that it is all a lie from beginning to end."

It was useless to say much to her, as she would not hear reason; and her letter, beginning with violent and heartrending exclamations of despair, ended by assuring Monsieur de Belleville that there was nothing whatever to fear: and after declaring her belief to her cousin that her husband was incapable of getting her to give up what she had done, if this claim had been in existence, she brought forward proofs of his having done things quite as bad in the very next line. In short, her letter was one as completely illogical as a woman's is often accused of being, and succeeded in doing only one

thing—puzzling Monsieur de Belleville most completely.

However, the writing of this letter was a relief to Madame d'Estanville: her spirits rose, and when Monsieur de Pendarves again left her, she was wonderfully cheerful and like herself. Her great anxiety now was to tell Jacqueline about Mademoiselle Morier's expected arrival. She knew that Jacqueline might be jealous. She was certain she would be inclined to resent the arrival of any one not actually a member of the family, and therefore she dreaded the little scene to which she might be exposed.

It was not till night, when the soft hair was being carefully brushed, that Madame d'Estanville began the attack.

"Jacqueline," began Madame d'Estanville, clearing her throat a little, "is Mademoiselle in bed?"

"She is in her room, and I think in bed," answered Jacqueline; "at any rate she is making no noise, which she generally does when she happens to be up."

"Will you look and see?" asked Madame

d'Estanville. Jacqueline crossed the ante-chamber. Marie was in bed and sleeping, the sound and healthy sleep of a young girl.

"Jacqueline," said Madame d'Estanville, "what a pity it is that my daughter is so very ignorant: she knows nothing; it is really frightful!"

"Does she know so very, very little?" asked Jacqueline, who was not in a particularly good temper that evening.

"She knows scarcely anything of music, possesses hardly a single accomplishment, and can speak no language but her own, except a little English, of no use to her."

"She sings like an angel," said Jacqueline, rather gruffly.

"She sings because she cannot help it; she has no turn for study," said Madame d'Estanville. "Alas! she is very ignorant. When I look back and reflect upon my own accomplishments at her age it makes me sad to think how few advantages she has had. I could understand and talk English and dance; I knew geography wonderfully well; and my grammar, I could almost say it backwards."

Jacqueline was silent; she knew that this was leading to something, but she could not make out what.

Madame d'Estanville began again. "A good education is a great thing, a very great thing, Jacqueline."

"Possibly," said Jacqueline, drily; "but let Madame look herself at the good she has derived from hers. Madame's English and her geography do not seem to have given much satisfaction to Madame, or to have done much towards making Madame's brilliant prospects fulfil their promise. Planted for years out of sight, Madame's courage and resignation have not been derived from her knowledge of geography."

"You do not understand, my good Jacqueline," said Madame d'Estanville, "that those things make my reading so interesting; it all helps."

Jacqueline gave a grunt.

Madame d'Estanville tried a new tack. "It is always a great thing to perform a good action," she said, meekly.

"Always supposing one can afford it," said

Jacqueline, tartly; "what good action is Madame thinking of now?"

"The orphan daughter of an old acquaintance is coming to reside with me," she said; "she is very, very clever, and extremely accomplished."

"And in return for the home Madame so generously proposes to afford to this interesting orphan what is she to do?" asked Jacqueline, in a tone of suppressed indignation.

"She is going to devote herself to my daughter, and try to teach her all she knows herself," answered Madame d'Estanville.

"Which may be very little indeed," said Jacqueline, half to herself. "Well, Madame of course knows best; Madame has, in fact, engaged an institutrice; Madame has doubtless received an accession to her fortune, since she proposes to increase her establishment in this way. May I ask if any others are coming to add to the household expenses?"

"Those who proposed this arrangement know my circumstances almost as well as you do, Jacqueline," said Madame d'Estanville, with touching dignity.

Jacqueline was subdued directly. "Pardon, Madame," she said, in a tone of great contrition.

"We are old friends, Jacqueline," said her mistress, "and I forgive you ; let it content you that though I gain nothing in the way of money (which, my good soul, you seem to think so much of) I lose nothing. All Mademoiselle Morier's expenses are to be paid."

Jacqueline was really so devoted to her mistress, and so sorry for having offended her, that she held her peace, performing with even more than her usual alacrity and marked respect those little offices which long custom had rendered necessary to poor Madame d'Estanville.

And the inmates of the château were soon asleep ; and no warning dreams disturbed them. Even Madame d'Estanville slept as though no threatening clouds were already darkening her horizon—oblivious for the time of all the agitation and distress that had that day broken in upon the usual monotony of her existence.

CHAPTER X.

"IT seems to me, my dear Anne," said Lady Hall to her daughter one day about this time, "that it is almost a pity we intend to know nobody."

Anne Hall looked up—long practice had taught her to know her mother's voice well. There was a deprecating tone about it now that told Anne her mother had "committed" herself in some way, and that she was afraid of telling her. Poor Lady Hall! if Anne was not at her elbow she was always doing things she ought not to have done. She answered a little stiffly—

"We agreed that as we did not know anything about the English people here we had better keep clear of them altogether; and

about the French, we have been here a whole week and no one as yet has called upon us."

"My dear Anne," began Lady Hall, her voice more timid than before, "you see, French ways and English ways are not the same. You have such strong good sense, dear Anne, you must see this;" and poor Lady Hall cleared her throat, and tried a little smile.

"Meaning"—said Anne, putting down her book, and looking straight at her mother in a relentless way.

"Nothing, my dear; nothing," said poor Lady Hall. "You see if we want to know French people we must go and call upon them first—that is always the way."

"Who told you so?" Anne Hall's voice was imperative.

"My dear Anne, you see, Simpkins wanted some buttons, and so I went off to get them at the little shop you like."

"And the shopwoman got familiar, as they always do here," said Anne, huffily.

"Oh, no," my dear, "civility itself, I assure you; nothing could exceed their civility; but when I got to the shop I entirely forgot the

name of the buttons in French, though I said it to myself all the way : there was a very peculiar handle to the door, and that quite put it out of my head. It went up, my dear, and down—do you understand?” and Lady Hall performed some feeble gymnastic movements with her hands.

“Not at all,” said Anne, shortly ; “well, and about the buttons?”

“I did everything I could do,” said Lady Hall ; “I showed them the buttons on my own dress, and they tried to match them, and I could not make them understand. At length a very nice-looking lady turned round and asked if she could help me ; and of course, my dear Anne, you are sensible enough to see that I could not refuse.”

“Is she French?” asked Anne, her mouth hardly opening to let the words out.

“No, my dear, English ; but living years and years in France, speaking French beautifully of course : so she was coming my way ; and we began to talk a little, and she, my dear Anne, knows all the French people, and she told me what I have just said.”

Anne Hall made no answer. Her mother

had a way of always becoming acquainted with wrong people, and it was very hard ; she had done so much to keep out of all acquaintance, and here it had begun.

“ You see I could not help it, could I ? ” said Lady Hall ; “ and, my dear Anne, I was so distant and so dignified, I really think I was hardly civil,” she added, with some compunctions of conscience.

“ What is her name ? ” asked Anne Hall, in a hard voice.

“ That is the funny thing, my dear ; Madame Biète.”

Anne Hall, for a wonder, got excited. “ Not,” she said, “ that dreadful-looking little woman, dressed like a decayed governess, in a musty old black silk dress ? ”

“ My dear, I never saw a decayed governess in my life, at least to my knowledge,” said Lady Hall ; “ but Madame Biète is very kind, and is quite a lady, my dear Anne ; and she is coming to call, my dear. She offered, and I am sure you understand I could not refuse ; ” and Lady Hall, very much relieved that the whole was said, lean backed in her chair and

paid particular attention to the stocking she was knitting. "After all," she added, gently, "she was asked to do so."

Anne Hall rose and left the room, shutting the door with a studious carefulness that was perfect in its way. It said as plainly as possible, I am a superior person, and I am above slamming a door. Somehow this irritated and jarred upon Lady Hall's nerves terribly, as did this way Anne had of withdrawing herself from a tête-à-tête, as if to say, I will reason with you by-and-by, when you are more fit to be reasoned with. Lady Hall knew it all, and saw exactly what lay before her—hours of silence, as if labouring under the deepest injury; a feeble appetite, as if eating under protest; a look of helpless, hopeless resignation, till every one round her owned themselves in the wrong. Over and over again this had happened, and over and over again it would happen till the end of the chapter. It was strange, thought poor Lady Hall, that she should mind so much; many people would not care one bit; but Lady Hall knew she did care—that to the latest hour of her husband's

life his temper had destroyed all the happiness she might have enjoyed; and that Anne's uncertain and miserable disposition would always affect her, as it affected her now. Her one comfort lay in the hope that "dear Anne" would marry happily some day, and a happy marriage with a sensible and superior man. . . Sam was sure to marry some one blessed with a very sweet temper, and dear Anne, much occupied in a happy home of her own, would be happy and settled; and in short, Lady Hall sat dreaming in this sort of way, and an hour or so passed away pleasantly enough. It is true that now and then, as she saw the sunshine dancing upon the sea, there came to her that wish to go out and enjoy it that comes naturally to people to whom a walk is a matter of real enjoyment. But Lady Hall never dreamed of indulging in such a wish—it would have been quite contrary to her principles; and though it would have been very pleasant to have sat upon the sands with a book and her knitting beside her to prevent her feeling idle, if dear Anne came down stairs by chance she might be vexed if she were not there. So Lady Hall

stifled a little sigh, and, all unconscious of the utter unselfishness of the way in which she always sacrificed herself to Anne, she turned to her book, and tried to read it, and to think of only pleasant things. But the plan did not succeed very well that day, and Lady Hall was obliged to confess to herself that she was a little lonely, and very sad.

Anne Hall was quoted perpetually as being "such a comfort" to her mother; friends always said so; Lady Hall believed it, and Anne herself was quite conscious of it—yet what was the truth?

Lady Hall was a very affectionate person; she was essentially fond of a peaceful and quiet life. By nature she was inclined to turn to the sunny side of life, to believe in general goodness, and, in short, was thoroughly amiable. She was beginning to own to herself that she would be much happier if Anne would only leave her with her delusions sometimes. It was so hard to be forced to see faults she would much rather ignore—and then that miserably uncomfortable, uncertain temper!

While Lady Hall was thus sitting alone, and,

whether profitably or not, dwelling upon Anne and her little peculiarities, Sam, in the full enjoyment of health and strength, without actual vanity, sufficiently conscious of a superiority in point of looks that made him feel upon good terms with himself and the world in general, was striding along with that easy swing that tells its own tale of active habits, and belongs by tradition only to Englishmen. He was accompanied by a large white bulldog, very powerful-looking, and with a face originally hideous, having singularly come to grief in some encounter—date unknown. Sam, gentle and tender of heart, as those strong giants generally are, was far too manly to be cruel; he had rescued the poor brute from some fight where the odds had been obviously uneven, and the dog adored him with the energy of instinctive gratitude ever afterwards.

Without being able to express poetically his sentiments about the acacia-trees, the river, and all the lavish beauty of that luxuriant country, Sam, whose mind was wholesome, healthy, and natural, felt that indescribable reverence, that rejoicing in nature, that, begin-

ning by the appreciation of God's beautiful works, rises insensibly to Him, and finds vent in a psalm of love and thankfulness, none the less fervent or sincere that it is silent and offered from the heart alone.

He wound his way up the road by the river-side, every now and then pausing to take in the view, until he reached the small "conciergerie," and the bridge that led into the grounds of the Château d'Estanville.

Only a day or two before he had driven up that way with his mother and sister, and they had stopped to look at the grand old place, struck by the picturesque beauty that surrounded it. He stopped again now, whistling softly to himself, all unconscious that at that moment some one was watching him. Marie d'Estanville, her book of poems on her lap, and Jolie at her feet, completely concealed by the thick foliage of the trees above, had heard footsteps, and, with the conscious security of Antoine's lodge, and the river rushing between her and anybody, had recognized the difference of step between Sam and the usual indescribable click-clack of the sabot that alone, as a

rule, passed on foot up that quiet valley. She heard the soft whistling, and then she saw the hero himself stop. As if on purpose to show her his pleasant countenance, he lifted off his cap, pushed his hair off his forehead, and resting his elbows on the wall, put his chin between the palms of his hands, and gazed down steadily at the river.

Marie sat motionless. She looked with an eagerness that was almost comical at the first real Saxon face she had ever seen. He certainly was her *beau-ideal* of a hero. The great broad shoulders and massive throat—the short hair that waved and did not curl. Doubtless he was thinking of battles, and all sorts of terrible things; perhaps had only just returned from some distant scene of war and bloodshed; might even have a concealed wound from which he was slowly recovering, only his look of perfect health was a little against this theory. There is no knowing what she might not have ascribed to him, when her romantic fancies were all put to flight by a very prosaic reality. Her hero sneezed! Not only once, but again—three times! This

sneeze immediately created great confusion. Jolie, hitherto placidly dreaming of chicken bones, and hunting imaginary cats who never scratched and never got up into trees, awoke, and became immediately conscious of the vicinity of a stranger. Before Marie could catch her she was off, racing round to the bridge, squeezed her small person through the grille of the lower part of the gates, and was bundling along the road, barking furiously in that short, sharp, angry manner peculiar to her race. Sam's bulldog went straight at her and bowled her over; upon which, uttering howls of indignant remonstrance, she jumped up on to the parapet, lost her balance, rolled over and over down the bank, and fell with a splash into a deep part of the river opposite Marie.

Marie, afraid of losing her pet, whose cries of distress went to her heart, rushed down to the brink of the river calling Jolie, and encouraging her in an agony of fear.

Sam, considerably astonished and heartily vexed, called Punch angrily to come back, and scrambling down the bank, rushed straight into the river, rescued Jolie, and then, partly

wading, partly using some large stones, he scrambled across, and placed Jolie, who was ungratefully struggling, barking, and biting, into Mademoiselle d'Estanville's outstretched arms.

"Oh, Jolie!" exclaimed Marie, caressing it. "Oh, Monsieur, I am so grateful! Jolie is my spoiled child, and I was afraid he was drowned."

"I am so sorry," said Sam. "My dog, you see, it was his fault."

"But how wet you are! how wet! Oh, you must come and change or get dry by the fire." She was turning to show him the way, when Jacqueline appeared.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed. "Why, here's a gentleman as wet as if he had been purposely bathing in his clothes."

"Jacqueline, this gentleman has saved Jolie's life," said Marie; "he has been in the river: he cannot, of course, walk home wet; he must come home with us, and change."

"Of course," said Jacqueline, who was taking an inventory of Monsieur's things, and had noticed with satisfaction his massive watch-chain, and the well-to-do air that belonged to him.

Marie, who had expected Jacqueline to be a little cross, was agreeably surprised to find her, on the contrary, pressing civilities upon him. In a few moments Sam was placed before a blazing wood fire, and left to his own devices, while Jacqueline went off for some of Monsieur d'Estanville's clothes, which she brought back to him. "Get into these, if you can," she said, "whilst I dry your things; I will not be long." A man of considerably over six feet does not get into clothes intended for a man measuring hardly five feet five in his boots, but Sam found a dressing-gown, and sitting in front of the fire, mused pleasantly upon his adventure.

Jacqueline was as good as her word; she was soon beside him, a cup of frothed chocolate in her hand. "Madame will be happy to receive Monsieur," she said, "when the things belonging to Monsieur are dry."

She left the room, and Sam, very much interested in the romance of his position, sipped his chocolate, which he did not particularly like, and thought of Marie, and how excessively pretty she was. Never had he seen

any one he admired so much : the bright look of her face, her graceful gestures, the frank and perfect ease of manner, with just a touch of dignity about it, as if one accustomed generally to be looked up to, was all new and delightful. "I wonder if she has a father, and if these are his things," mused Sam ; "he must be a very small man ; and what a wonderful selection ! I wonder why that old woman talked of Madame ; that looks as if Monsieur was not here. I never knew I spoke French so well before ;" he had hardly uttered half a dozen words. Jacqueline brought back his things, and he soon found himself ushered into the presence of Madame d'Estanville.

CHAPTER XI.

MADAME D'ESTANVILLE was in no mood for making new acquaintances, and when Marie rushed into her room and related her adventure, her first feeling was one of extreme annoyance, which gave place to amusement as she listened to her daughter's enthusiastic account of what had passed.

"Petite mère!" she exclaimed, "he is a hero, really a hero, and his head is just like the Achilles you made me try to draw, and which I never could finish because of the difficulty of the curls, only his curls are not so stiff. Splash! he went, and my poor Jolie—little stupid thing, I thought she was drowned, and he was so wet."

"Jolie or the hero?" asked Madame d'Estanville, quietly.

"Both," answered Marie, laughing. "You will see and thank him, will you not?"

"I dare say he is some English adventurer," said Madame d'Estanville, bitterly; "now that Ortan-sur-Mer has become fashionable, we shall not want society in the neighbourhood—good, bad, and indifferent."

"Oh, mother, he is a gentleman," said Marie; "but you will see for yourself."

Marie was right; when Madame d'Estanville saw Mr. Hall, she felt that he could be no adventurer; there was something in the open, frank face and pleasant smile that spoke for itself. Her practised eyes, and the manner in which she had first greeted him, savouring as it had done of condescension, softened into cordiality. When she had talked to him a little while there was a freshness of feeling about him, an enthusiasm, an enjoyment of life without adventitious excitement, that was such a happy contrast to "young France." He was not ashamed of his warm home-feelings, and spoke of his mother with a reverence and affec-

tion that completed his conquest over Madame d'Estanville.

Still she was prudent ; unfortunately (though the equalization of prices is rendering it less possible now) those English who haunt the watering-places in France have usually been those who sought security from creditors, or quietness after some notorious scrape ; and even now many French people, belonging to Madame d'Estanville's world, conceive themselves justified in withholding intimacy, unless specially assured by good introductions that their English visitors are likely to prove pleasant acquaintances, just as much as in England people are shy of foreigners till they know something about them.

It was therefore unsatisfactory to poor Sam to find himself dismissed with a politeness that left nothing to be desired by Madame d'Estanville after a short visit, without a single word of encouragement, or expressing the faintest wish to see him again ; while Marie, demurely seated with her embroidery, never once looked at him, and only bowed when she wished him good-bye.

He took leave, with his mind in a state of distraction, little imagining the pleasant impression he was leaving behind him. There were so many things he could have said; why had he not said them? What a fool he must have looked! and the beauty he had been so conscious of all the way up the valley stretched out as before, but was utterly unheeded. He arrived at home with a feeling as nearly cross as he was capable of, and told himself that there was something about French people he did not understand, and could not quite like.

When he left, Madame d'Estanville told her daughter of the expected arrival of Mademoiselle Morier. Marie heard her with very much the feelings Jacqueline had had—a secret feeling of dismay; she did not know what to say, and looked at her mother in silence.

“You say nothing; do you not like this news, little one?” Madame d'Estanville was so anxious that she should like it. “You will have a companion; you will no longer be dull; you will always have some one with you.”

“I am not dull, and I only want you,” said

poor Marie, kissing her hand, while the bright eyes filled with tears.

"My darling, you will learn much, so much from Mademoiselle Morier; she is something wonderful, I hear."

"I don't think I like wonderful people," answered Marie, quietly, and a little sadly.

"But it is so good for you; you have had so few advantages, my child; and I hope you will love this girl. Poor thing! she has had terrible misfortunes, and she is an orphan."

Marie made no answer. To her the vision of a perpetual third was absolutely terrible. She and Jacqueline arranged so well by themselves, so that no evidence of their extremely scanty means should be made visible to Madame d'Estanville; this would be much more difficult with a third person and a stranger, and Marie's pride could not bear that a stranger should come in and see the "nakedness of the land."

Madame d'Estanville began to feel that she had made a mistake. Monsieur de Pendarves, Jacqueline, and now Marie, all disliked the plan; and the feeling that she had displeased

them all, and that sort of consciousness of having acted hastily, was very disagreeable, and made her feel cross. She had been worked upon by the glowing account of Mademoiselle Morier's talents, and a skilful allusion to her daughter's want of accomplishments; and her heart had been touched by the unprotected state of Adèle, and by the great wish she had expressed to become a member of her family. There was a little severity in her voice when she next spoke to Marie, and this chilled and depressed her daughter excessively. She did not know how tried her mother had been; she did not know anything about the storms and troubles threatening the peace of their house; but she went to bed with an indefinable feeling of depression both new and strange to her.

Poor Madame d'Estanville, when Marie had left her, sat wearily thinking of all that might happen, till her head whirled, and Jacqueline saw that there was trouble, and wondered what on earth was going to happen now. As for Mademoiselle Morier, she cordially detested her *d'avance*, and had made Marie smile by declaring her conviction that when she arrived

she would prove to have goggle eyes and large hands and feet, "and Madame will be miserable. She expects beauty, she will find this forward young person a perfect Gorgon. Beauty is something, after all, *ma mignonne*," she said, as she braided up Marie's long and silky tresses, with a feeling of complacency, and Marie laughed, and entirely agreed with her.

CHAPTER XII.

MADAME D'ESTANVILLE might not have slept so soundly had she been aware of the vicinity of her greatest enemy, Monsieur Jules Maître ; still less had she had any idea of the ambitious project which had been at the bottom of the "claim" which had so startled and alarmed her.

Monsieur Maître was the son of an old steward, who had been one grand cause of all the extravagance of the late Monsieur d'Estanville.

He had had a small office—not in his own name—at a town a few miles off, where he traded so advantageously upon the necessities of others, and lent money on such usurious interest, that he acquired an enormous fortune.

He played his game with some skill, so far as Monsieur d'Estanville was concerned. He was always at hand, ready to lend him small sums of money, even before his marriage; and his master, when he confounded, without any mincing of terms, the rapacity and rascality of the money-lending rogue to whom he so frequently applied, never had the faintest suspicion that the rogue in question was his once confidential valet, steward, and chief adviser.

When he died, Jules Maître succeeded to a much larger fortune than any one had any idea of; and at first the great novelty of finding himself in the possession of so much money had given him satisfaction; but after a time he found that money, though it can buy most things, failed to procure him the only friends he was ambitious of having.

Perhaps in no country in the world does money hold less influence than it does in France, especially among the old families and old nobles. The more a man's wealth is paraded before their eyes, the less likely are they to accept him amongst them. Madame Biète's husband—bereft of fortune, teaching in

an English village, poor, and working for his daily bread—was courted and sought. Many a duchess, with a royal pedigree, wrote kindly letters to him, and consoled him during his exile; but a man of the type of Jules Maître might do as he pleased. They might make his acquaintance, and even ask him to a crowded party, but to their little dinners *intime*—never.

Towards more than one family with a “demoiselle à marier” had Jules Maître cast ambitious glances, but he could find no one even to present him; and even he, with a stolid conviction of the success money might have, found the barriers impassable. He was not a good man, but he had not had much chance of being a different man from his father; he had never known his mother; he had been brought up anyhow, sometimes at a good school—when his father thought of him at all—sometimes for months neglected entirely; associating with any stray and idle boys in the place: he was cruel, vindictive, revengeful, mean, and ambitious.

Madame d'Estanville had offended him

deeply many years ago, and the circumstance lived in his memory. He had been sent by his father—as a lad of seventeen—with a note to the château. Madame d'Estanville, hating the very name of old Maître, had simply said the messenger was to wait in the kitchen, and answered the note verbally after perusing it. He could not comfort himself with the idea that she had not known who he was, for he heard her say, “Tell Monsieur Maître’s messenger so and so.” And Jacqueline answered, “It is his son!” upon which Madame d'Estanville had said, “Well, even supposing he is as great a rogue as his father the message can go through him.”

It never occurred to Madame d'Estanville that the place where his father had always dined could be beneath the son; but young Maître had never forgiven it.

He purchased d'Occtrung, partly because he wanted a landed property, but also because he felt it would mortify Madame d'Estanville to see the old place in his hands; and while he was there he one day accidentally saw Marie d'Estanville.

From that moment he resolved not to leave a stone unturned till he succeeded in marrying her. He felt that she would raise his position as no one else would. Something in the proud bearing of the whole girlish figure, something spirited and noble in the face, struck him with the certainty of success, if he could call her his.

Taking information (but not counsel) from his man of business, he found out two things; one that the only near relation Madame d'Estanville possessed, upon whom she was on friendly terms, was Monsieur de Belleville; the other was this unpaid debt—money which had been advanced for the payment of a gambling debt incurred by Monsieur d'Estanville.

The whole scheme was instantly projected in his brain; he would work the one to the advancement of the other; and within one week of his discovery Monsieur Belleville had been written to, had answered, and M. Maître presented himself at the door of the Count's rooms in Paris—knowing so much of that gentleman's antecedents, past and present occupations, as would considerably have astonished

him had he been in the faintest degree aware of it.

Monsieur de Belleville was sitting digesting his luncheon, and, to tell the truth, was a little out of sorts with himself, his valet, and the world at large. When, therefore, M. Maître's card was brought to him he looked at it discontentedly and abstractedly, turned it upside down, and puzzled himself a little as to who it could be.

"Jean," he asked, "is this man a gentleman?"

"Judging by his coat, no," answered Jean, promptly.

"What do you mean?"

"It is much too good," said Jean, feelingly ; "looks too new."

"Is he a tailor?" asked Monsieur de Belleville, with a slight tremor in his voice.

"Certainly not," said Jean ; "he is a rich man, who has not made his own fortune, or he would not be so ready to give away," he added, in a lower tone.

"Who the devil is he?"

"I cannot say. His clothes are marvellously

good and new, and so are his boots, but he does not look at his ease, somehow ; Monsieur understands."

"You evidently understand," said the Count, amused.

"I should be an idiot, having lived so long with Monsieur, if I did not know a little of the world," said Jean, modestly ; "this man is neither fish, flesh, nor fowl, but a little of all."

"I will see him," said the Count ; "and if he is a tailor in disguise, with his little bill, I'll decapitate you." So the man of the world put off his dressing-gown, and leisurely prepared for an interview with an unknown individual, little imagining how much the subject of the coming conversation would influence the destinies of Marie d'Estanville.

CHAPTER XIII.

MONSIEUR MAÎTRE waited for some time before the Count appeared, and it required all his self-confidence to enable him to meet him. As the moments flew on, his courage evaporated more and more, and by the time they met face to face Monsieur Maître was as nervous as he could be.

The Count, upon his side, was calm, dignified, and slightly curious—wondering to what class the man before him belonged. Jean was right, he certainly was not a tailor; what brought him there?

Monsieur de Belleville himself was a man with an upright military figure, which he owed to his profession, well-made hands, which he owed to nature, and an immense chest, which

he owed to art. His manner, calm and deliberate, was in reality superb. He had a grand air, that imposed so upon every one, that every word he spoke gave you an impression that he had reflected deeply upon the subject mentioned, and his opinion, so slowly delivered, carried immense weight. No one hearing him dwell upon the patriotism and largeness of his views could have believed in his sublime selfishness. He was one of those men who glided calmly over the surface of things, feeling nothing deeply enough to render him unhappy, and who, standing aloof from all the ordinary cares and trials of life, felt grateful, and thanked Heaven that he had none of the recognized ties which brought seemingly so much more trouble and anxiety than pleasure. These, at least, had been his feelings, but lately he had been subject to occasional misgivings. There comes a time in the life of even the most successful man, when the charm of home and home feelings become recognized, if never before. As years roll on, and the world paying back (as it always does, sooner or later), in the coin it has received, begins to shrink from

infirmities it is the first to notice, and to shake off as a bore the man who, living exclusively for the world, has simply succeeded because he amused it—then comes the time when the society of a wife, blind to all infirmities, and of children who are never bored, is longed for or appreciated.

Monsieur de Belleville was too “great” a man to say to himself, “I have mistaken the shadow for the substance, and pinned my faith to that which now fails me. I have made a mistake, and if I had the power would live my life over again very differently ;” but he thought so all the same, felt it over and over again, when day by day brought him the conviction that those resources against *ennui* he had hitherto successfully employed now began to fail.

But Monsieur de Belleville was far too full of belief in himself to accept this unsatisfactory state of things as final. Why should he not marry even now, and endow with his aristocratic name the daughter of some financier with an immense fortune, and a proper appreciation for himself? He had, indeed, various plans begin-

ning and ending matrimonially; and Jean, who alone initiated behind the scenes into those mysteries which produced M. le Comte before them so complete a success—from the well-waxed moustaches to the toe of his well-made boot—was driven to making sundry cynical reflections upon the increasing vanity that made his master so particular as to the exact shade of his whiskers, and the affected carelessness of his hair.

Monsieur Maître was impressed by the excessive politeness of Monsieur le Comte, and the other seeing, with the keen-sightedness of an experienced man of the world, something of the character of the man before him, relaxed into a soi-disant equality, putting Monsieur Maître at his ease sufficiently to enable him to show himself up a little; he knew that unless his visitor was considerably at his ease, he would not be at all likely to satisfy his curiosity.

But Monsieur Maître was an older and a deeper hand than Monsieur le Comte quite understood. He wished, in the position he assumed, to gain credit for a generous dis-

regard of money matters, which would be neutralised if the fact of his having seen Madame d'Estanville's beautiful daughter came to be known. He had seen her but once, but he knew, instinctively, that the moment she was seen in the world she was just one of those beautiful girls who would carry all before her. He knew something of the world, and had seen many a one with not half her pretensions turn the heads of many older and wiser than himself. To arrange a marriage with her before she knew her value, to gain the credit of a disinterested passion, and then, surrounded by all his wealth could give her, bring her forward to dazzle the world by her beauty, whilst he reigned alone as the man who had sought her in obscurity, and who had won her for herself—this was his plan.

So when they began to talk Monsieur de Belleville was completely puzzled. Having no clue, he could not fathom the motives of the man who sat smiling complacently before him.

Monsieur Maître, with a seeming frankness of manner that did not sit badly upon him,

said, "I have come, Monsieur le Comte, to express in person my great regret that the mistimed zeal of my man of business should have caused annoyance to so distinguished a lady as Madame d'Estanville."

Monsieur de Belleville bowed as well as his deeply-padded chest allowed, and said nothing.

"I assure you, Monsieur le Comte," said Monsieur Maître, "that I would sacrifice everything, put myself to any amount of inconvenience, rather than embarrass Madame d'Estanville in any way."

Monsieur de Belleville simply did not believe him.

"I am nominally a very rich man," continued Monsieur Maître, "*nominally*, but I assure Monsieur le Comte that the debts left by my father have made my fortune considerably less than is believed. This sum of money is no trifle to me."

"Monsieur," said the Comte de Belleville, grandly, "all this is very well, but wide of the mark; the question is not your fortune or your sacrifices, or even your father's debts (which, by the way, seems the prevailing legacy in these

days), it is simply a question of right, and had better be settled by your man of business and hers. I merely interfered as her relation. I confess I do not understand these things at all."

"If Monsieur le Comte will run his eye over these papers he will see at once that the claim is quite a justifiable one, and one that is well founded."

"Then, I repeat, show it to some man of business," said the Count, testily. "I hate business and business papers."

"Monsieur, then, refuses to let me tell him a plan that has been suggested to me. I should else not have dared to entertain it."

He rose as he said this, and his voice was lowered; there was a deference in his manner which was calculated to please Monsieur le Comte, and it succeeded.

"Monsieur," he said, gravely, "all disputes and discussions are to be avoided, still I tell you frankly that I do not myself understand how any plan you may have to suggest can in any way affect the position of affairs. The thing all rests upon one broad basis. Is

Madame d'Estanville indebted to you, or is she not? I believe not. To talk of sacrifices, &c., is simply nonsense," continued he, grandly, waving his hand. "Madame d'Estanville's family will take care that she is not placed under lamentable obligations to a stranger."

"The subject under consideration, the plan I have to propose is so delicate," said Monsieur Maître, still in his well-assumed deferential manner, "that I confess I should not like to submit it to the hands of a mere man of business; it is because Monsieur le Comte's tact and fine sense of delicacy is world-renowned that I came, and without personal acquaintance ventured to intrude upon him. The great courtesy with which Monsieur le Comte has received me has not disappointed my expectations."

This speech considerably mollified the Count. "If," he said, "Monsieur has really something important to say, I am perfectly willing to listen for a short time; I would merely remind Monsieur that with the many claims society has upon me, my time is hardly to be called my own." He pulled out his watch, and re-

tained it in his hand, comparing it with the golden clock on the chimneypiece, which, it may be remarked, had not only lost one hand, but had not been going for many, many months. He was destined to be startled, however, when Monsieur Maître said suddenly—

“Madame d'Estanville has a daughter.”

For an instant the Count did not understand. The truth was that he looked upon Monsieur Maître as a person as apart from his standing and private life, as even having really less to do with him than the tailor he had fancied him; and indeed Monsieur le Comte's tailor was on very intimate terms with him, which made Jean, when the Count was in a good humour, and able to bear a joke, talk pleasantly to him of his bosom friend, with reference to the padded mysteries before alluded to.

But as Monsieur Maître bent a little forward, listening in intense anxiety for his answer, the whole thing flashed upon the Count's mind, and at a glance he saw where Monsieur Maître wished to be, and what he had come for. Before he had time to frame an answer that would not commit him in any way, Monsieur

Maître began in a low and earnest voice to press his views upon him, always in the deferential manner, but without the hesitation and almost nervousness that had hitherto characterized him.

“Monsieur le Comte,” he said, “I am a man whom fortune has favoured in money matters, without having toiled all the best years of my life. I am rich, and have my youth before me. But I am not happy, Monsieur le Comte. The fortune I hold places me nominally on a footing with proprietors and gentlemen by whom I am surrounded, and who, in spite of my best endeavours, look upon me as an interloper. I am ambitious: I seek to marry some one upon whom no one will look down—some one who has sufficient position of her own to enable her to keep her place and draw me upward. I hear that Madame d'Estanville is poor. I ask you only to satisfy yourself that this claim is just; let the debt then be forgotten, and let the hand of Mademoiselle d'Estanville bury past animosities. Let Madame d'Estanville forgive my presumption, and erasing me from

her list of creditors, render me for ever grateful and happy as her son-in-law. I ask for no dowry: I will myself endow her; the half, the whole of my fortune—nothing will be too much to prove my gratitude and my devotion!”

The Count was excessively puzzled; this sounded very good indeed, but was there nothing behind the scenes? He disbelieved so utterly in the possibility of any one being purely disinterested, that he did not conceive the fact of wanting a well-born wife was sufficient to account for an offer of marriage to any penniless young lady. He, of course, could not know how many and many a time the man before him had been made to smart because of his want of birth — how often he had sworn vengeance in his heart against those who ate his dinners, and drank his wine, borrowed of him, played with him, made use of him, and dropped him when they had taken all they wished out of him.

“Monsieur Maître is not perhaps aware,” said the Count, gravely, “that there exists nowhere in the world a more honourable lady

than Madame d'Estanville; but she is the proudest person I know anywhere. I do not myself see the use of asking her about this."

"I must bear the pain of the refusal," said Monsieur Maître; "at any rate, Monsieur le Comte will make me his debtor eternally if he will submit my proposal to Madame d'Estanville. Monsieur le Comte will not refuse?"

"If you really wish it," said the Count, "I will undertake to think it over; but you must remember that, even should you establish your claim, you will have years to wait. Why, her mother, my dear sir, is some years younger than I am, and the daughter consequently can hardly be out of long clothes yet;" and the Count drew up his head, made the most of his chest, and patted it gently, as if he was caressing it.

"Vain old peacock!" said Monsieur Maître to himself; and then he said aloud, "I believe Mademoiselle d'Estanville is seventeen."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the Count, "impossible!"

"At all events, Monsieur le Comte will lay my proposal before Madame d'Estanville—if

Monsieur would merely say he will be my ambassador——”

“You go much too fast,” said Monsieur de Belleville, pettishly; “why, I have not yet digested the idea myself, and I do not know whether your claim is really a just claim. I know nothing, positively nothing, and the hand of my cousin, Mademoiselle d'Estanville, is not a matter to be instantly given away like that of a commoner person. Really, Monsieur, I wish you had chosen some one else. Here am I, without children of my own, tormented as if I had ten daughters to dispose of, and you will not be the last. Good gracious!” he continued, mournfully, “I may be forced into interviews, and made to think, every day of my life. The prospect is absolutely frightful. Good morning, sir. Yes, I will think it over, and if this goes on,” he added, as Monsieur Maître left the room, “I shall have to buy a wig at once, as I shall soon be bald from intense anxiety.”

CHAPTER XIV.

MADAME LEROUX was by no means a meek woman, or one likely to sit down with folded hands, and a calm acquiescence in the existing state of things, while she had an unredressed grievance at her very door. She was a woman who was better fitted than most to fight a battle against adverse circumstances.

She was a widow, endowed with a great deal of energy, and no particular vocation, and she had a perfect talent for being miserable. She had a moderate income, perfect health, and no particular anxieties, and spent her life in one perpetual warfare against fate.

No one could ever remember her without a grievance. Before she married, her being

single was a grievance ; when she married, her husband was a grievance ; then his death was another. According to her own account, she always was the most unlucky woman in the world. Her one servant performed iniquities unequalled by any other servants ; her kitchen range burnt most coal or wood, and gave out the minimum of heat ; her charcoal arrived smashed into such small pieces that she was twice as long as her neighbours in raising her fire, and it went out twice as soon ; her minute proportion of house linen was quite certain to be reduced to rags from an overdose of eau-de-javelle, and, in short, every minor misery under the sun was sure to visit her in some way. She had one duchesse pear-tree, and after sharing in some years of such prosperity that pears were selling for five francs a hundred, the one year, when they were in great request, and she might have got rid of them for twenty-five francs, her tree had a blight, and she had not one hundred to sell. Fate was against her, and nothing that could be said would persuade her that she had only herself to blame for not having whitewashed

and nursed her tree, when her neighbours saw the necessity for doctoring theirs.

It may be imagined how she entered heart and soul into a real, tangible grievance. Her rooms had been rejected because of a strong odour, unflatteringly known by English residents as "bouquet de France;" this gave her a claim on the town of Ortan-sur-Mer, and a right to persecute the excellent and long-suffering man, whose name was Grandchamps, and who held the post of "Monsieur le Maire."

Urbane, courteous, and thoroughly good-hearted, Monsieur le Maire was the most popular man in the place. With that injustice which, after all, is simply human, the people at Ortan-sur-Mer persisted in complimenting him upon the prosperity with which, in reality, he had nothing whatever to do, just as they would have probably decapitated him if they had lost by the speculations they had plunged into.

The persecution instituted by Madame Leroux was his one thorn. She pursued him with letters; she attacked him in the street; she

introduced her grievance when he was least prepared for her ; and she would not and could not see that, so far as Monsieur le Maire was concerned, he was powerless as herself.

The thing itself was quite simple ; the street in question belonged to “la liste civile.”

Now in France, in every town, and almost every village, every one knows that the one sore spot everywhere—the one road which is impassable—the disused building, which might be so useful as a “cercle” or a reading-room—the eyesore of almost every place, belongs to “la liste civile.”

Why such a short road might not be improved, such a ditch filled up, such a piece of waste land reclaimed ? the answer is invariably the same—“la liste civile” stands in the way of every improvement, and is likely to do so. It means a crown right, which the Emperor himself can do nothing with, and which would require in many cases a separate Act of Parliament, and a sort of unearthing and bringing forward of so many complications from the “droits communaux” to every “droits” one ever heard of, that the thing is considered

hopeless, and, as such, is accepted with more or less resignation by every one.

Poor Monsieur le Maire endeavoured to explain this to Madame Leroux, and tried to soften the asperity of her temper by appealing to her sense of justice as to his limited powers.

“Why not improve the street?” she exclaimed over and over again; “why am I to be the one woman at Ortan-sur-Mer who is to be ruined because of the density of the conseil municipal? What is your liste civile to me? Am I not a lady, and, as such, entitled to proper treatment? Am I not an inhabitant of Ortan-sur-Mer, with the rights of a citizen? Do I not give many francs at all the ‘quêtes des pauvres?’ and on one occasion, when the brasserie was burnt down, did I not myself hold the plates, and assist in making the collection, in spite of a violent pain in my left leg and a tendency to neuralgia in my right eye? and let me tell you, Monsieur le Maire, respecting you personally, as I do not say is not the case, on public grounds I shall everywhere complain of you. You do nothing, and yet I tell you I am being ruined! Monsieur le Maire, you do

not do your duty, and it is I myself who tell you so."

"But, Madame, what can I do?" said the much-tried man. "I have told you that you ask an impossibility. The street in which you live belongs to the *liste civile*, and neither you nor I can touch it; I have said it so often, and how often must I repeat it? Be reasonable, I beg of you."

"Reasonable!" exclaimed Madame Leroux; "do you ask me to be reasonable when I see Madame Bayon walking to church in a *faillie d'Anvers*, for which I know she must have paid three hundred francs, and I, whose merits, I suppose, are not less than Madame Bayon's, though I do not happen to have four boys and nothing upon earth to give them—have for my best gown only a *méchante Alpaga*, with a decidedly bluish tinge owing to its having been twice dipped and twice cleaned; and you ask me to be reasonable!"

"Why do you not give up your apartment and take another? Let me look out for one for you."

"Hear him!" exclaimed Madame Leroux;

“as if apartments like mine are to be picked up every day. I have no intention of moving, and *you must drain my street*,” she said, in a concentrated voice, and with an expression of determination; “you may talk for ever, but I do not intend turning out of my comfortable rooms because you are too timid to carry matters with a high hand.”

“Madame, really——”

“Oh! pardon, Monsieur le Maire; but you really must allow me to say one word; you need not bring up your *liste civile*, &c. If it is true, it is ridiculous that mine should be the only street belonging to the *liste civile*; and it is very hard upon me; but the world says, Monsieur, and I think it has some right, that you are entirely absorbed in your English friendships, and that we poor people, who are not rich and not foreigners, are nothing to you.”

“But, Madame,” said poor Monsieur Grand-champs, who was almost driven to forget his usual politeness, “all I can say is, that it is most unjust to accuse me of being indifferent to the interests either of yourself or any other inhabitant of Ortan-sur-Mer. I did not

make the laws—I did not originate the difficulty you are in: you took an apartment very cheap because it happened to be in a bad situation; you chose it with open eyes; and now you cry aloud because we cannot improve it. I must wish you good morning;” and with much less patience than usual, poor Monsieur Grandchamps gladly left her.

But this persecution, annoying as it was, would have, in reality, effected very little if it had ended there, which it did not do. Madame Leroux was not wanting in sympathizers, and indirectly assailed Monsieur Grandchamps through the very conseil municipal that she affected to despise.

All the world knows that nothing in the world would ever be done without opposition, either passive or active; and this private grievance of Madame Leroux’s caused bitterness unending to Monsieur le Maire, who found himself dragged from one question to another through “Acts” almost as offensive in their dreary length as the very street which was at the bottom of all this commotion.

CHAPTER XV.

"I do not believe a word of it, Lisette, not one word. You were always a good hand at telling stories, and if you suppose that you can take me in, you are wrong."

Jacqueline's sharp voice uttered these words; she was full of indignation, and swung the salad in its wire basket to and fro, as if Lisette were in it, and she was "serving her out."

"Mademoiselle Jacqueline, I am a girl of perfect veracity; I never told a useless story in my life. You must remember, this is not like breaking a plate, or eating any of the cold meat. Of course, if I am expecting a box on the ears, I am not such a fool as to incriminate myself. This is a very different thing."

Lisette, very fat, very red in the face, and in

that object of ambition to all French girls in her class of life—a fine shawl—spoke earnestly.

“Five meals a day, the days are too short for such a thing. You need not say any more. I will not believe it!”

“Five meals a day—even six, to speak rigidly,” persisted Lisette.

“That is right, go on,” said Jacqueline. “Why not go on? six—why not twelve—one every hour?”

“Mademoiselle Jacqueline, listen,” began Lisette, holding up her plump arms, and telling off the number she wanted to impress upon her quondam superior on thumb and fingers. “First, at eight, miladi has a cup of tea, strong as poison, and slices of bread and butter so thin that you can see through them. That makes one slight repast, but still a repast.”

Jacqueline nodded her head.

“Then at ten there is a breakfast that would frighten most Christians; hot sweet tea and cold meat, coffee and hot fish—fish fried—arranged in various ways—always hot sweet tea, hot coffee, meat, cold things and hot, eaten with an indifference that is barbaric.”

Jacqueline stood scornfully attentive.

"At one, behold more food," said Lisette, "more meat, hot, cold, salad, vegetables, sweets, wine, beer, the same things, minus the tea. At five, tea again, bread and butter, and little cakes. At half-past seven, dinner—and what a dinner! soup and fish, meats, various kinds, and always puddings and pies, cheese, and any fruit and sweet things." Lisette paused for breath.

Jacqueline's eyes and hands were upheld. "What a dreadful thing!" she said. "Why, it is eating all day long!"

"I have not yet done," said Lisette. "After dinner, again tea or coffee—sometimes both; and again wine and little biscuits just before going to bed."

"It is shameful," said Jacqueline; "no wonder prices rise: the English will eat up everything we have in the country, like locusts. What are we coming to?"

"The young Mr. Hall is very handsome indeed," said Lisette, "and they are terribly rich. I sometimes wish——"

"Wish what?" said Jacqueline, sharply.

"That, somehow or other, some of their riches could be here," said Lisette. "They have too much."

"Madame, thank Heaven, is rich, very rich indeed," said Jacqueline, angrily. "Were your wages not paid to a day? Do you suppose, because Madame's rank is so great, that she is not in the least obliged to spend money in order to show she is a lady, like your English people: because she does not happen to be a glutton, and eat all day long, she is therefore poor?"

"Is Madame rich?" asked Lisette, in surprise; "and yet how often our dinner consisted of bread, radishes, and salt."

"Because it was good for you," said Jacqueline, very decidedly. "Why, if I chose to say to-morrow to Madame, I should like an establishment of servants, we should have them directly; but even you were more than I cared to trouble myself about. Rich? Madame is as rich—oh, very rich! with diamonds here, in the bank in Paris; jewels, that a princess would covet. I repeat, Madame is very rich."

"If I were rich," said Lisette, "I should

spend more of my money, and have very good dinners."

"The girl is already depraved by her English companions," exclaimed Jacqueline, angrily. "Madame being so highly born does not care for show, and even the small dinners I prepare she scarcely touches at times."

"Not being highly born, I like a good dinner, and my appetite is excellent," said Lisette, quaintly. "Well, Mademoiselle Jacqueline, I wish you would come some day and see me."

"Do you suppose I have nothing to do but run about?" exclaimed Jacqueline. "And why should I come to see you?"

"I should like you to come very much. I spoke a great deal about you to—well, to young Monsieur Hall, and he said very polite things."

"Lisette," said Jacqueline, throwing aside her sharp and defiant manner of speaking, and laying her hand on the girl's shoulder, with an action full of tenderness, almost motherly, "you are young, and in that house have no friend by your side to guide and guard you.

You must not speak to Monsieur Hall. He does not belong to your class; it is not right."

"I am sure I do not care," said Lisette; "only when a gentleman says a civil word to me, it is only manners to be grateful. Besides, Mademoiselle Jacqueline, there is some one—— What do you think of this shawl? and Lisette turned her broad shoulders round slowly to call Jacqueline's attention to the pattern.

"You have got a lover?" asked Jacqueline, "and when does he propose to marry you?"

"Oh! Mademoiselle Jacqueline, it is not so far as that. Oh! he is lovely!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands together ecstatically.

"It is only so far as giving the shawl," said Jacqueline. "Oh, my poor Lisette, take care."

"I need take no care," answered Lisette. "It is quite open, and, Mademoiselle Jacqueline, he is—who do you think? Monsieur Alphonse Caumont! There!"

"Monsieur Alphonse Caumont! and who may he be when he's at home, if he has a home?"

"Mademoiselle Jacqueline! not know Monsieur Alphonse Caumont! positively not know

who Monsieur Alphonse Caumont is—good gracious! Why, he is the Monsieur Caumont of Caumont's 'Arabic spicy bald-forbidding balsam,' who went to Paris, got it introduced to the Emperor, who uses pots, and pots, and pots of it, and got it patented—and I have a pot he himself gave me."

"Who, the Emperor?" asked Jacqueline, gravely.

"Oh, Mademoiselle Jacqueline! No; Monsieur Alphonse Caumont: he has the shop—the perfumer's shop—where every one and Mademoiselle Simpkins went to see what chignons were to be worn this year; and loads and loads of people go there to get their hair cut and see the fashions; and oh! he is so very good-looking, and has conceived an admiration for your character; but an admiration . . . from anecdotes I have related to him. He is charming, and comes every day to give Mademoiselle Simpkins' lessons; of course I am there to help her to understand, and as she cannot understand one word of French it is delightful, it is a tête-à-tête without the awkwardness of one. I assure you it is charming. He is a great man,

and has had a career," said Lisette, in a tone of profound admiration.

"Indeed!" said Jacqueline, indifferently.

"Mademoiselle Jacqueline, you really are very teasing," said Lisette, pouting as she knew how to pout; "Monsieur Caumont is very deeply interested in you, in Madame, in Mademoiselle, and in me. He used to know the late Monsieur d'Estanville, of sainted memory, having frequently seen him at the house where his master lived."

"Then this Monsieur Caumont had some other home besides the magnificent one secured by a successful pomatum."

"Oh, yes! he was confidential friend, and I do not know what, to the father of Monsieur Jules Maître, who has bought d'Occtrung."

"Indeed!" said Jacqueline, tightening her lips. She knew too well all that name had been to the family she served and loved.

"He takes such a deep interest in everything about Mademoiselle and every one here: it is really touching," said Lisette, earnestly.

"Well, Lisette, the less you say the better," said Jacqueline. "It is excessively impertinent

of him to be interested in anything so far above him. And I trust you will be discreet, Lisette, and answer with a proper dignity ; tell him, at once, you do not choose to be questioned : depend upon it he is a dangerous acquaintance."

"He gave me this shawl," said Lisette, her face flushing a little.

"And do you suppose he gave it to you for nothing, you silly girl ? Why, use your wits, if you have any, and, above all, be discreet. Refuse to allow the subject of this house to be mentioned between you. I have my reasons."

Lisette's conscience pricked her severely ; she knew that not only had she chattered very openly to Monsieur Caumont, but that she had enlarged upon the poverty Jacqueline had that night denied. To still her self-reproaches, she began by assuring Jacqueline vehemently she had not uttered one word upon a subject so delicate ; and Jacqueline, world-wise, looked into her face and knew that every detail of their domestic life, every little fact that could be repeated, was now in the hands of Monsieur Caumont, if not also Monsieur Hall.

CHAPTER XVI.

IT must be confessed that poor Lady Hall's life was not particularly bright or happy just at this time. Between her wish to please her son and to keep the peace with him, she found herself perpetually in a great dilemma. She herself felt ungrateful in so coldly withdrawing from Madame Biète's offers of service. But Madame Biète had not lived so long in the world without being quite able to see the position of affairs in the family of the Halls. Knowledge of character is certainly a gift, and one that improves considerably with practice : it is also a study that grows much upon one ; and if people instead of hastily judging (and often prejudging) those among whom their lives are passed, would go a little deeper,

and learn a little of their trials, their temptations, and the circumstances which have helped to make them what they are, they would many a time wonder that the eccentricities or disagreeable peculiarities that affect them so sensibly, are not far more prominent than they are.

Madame Biète had a large share of the spirit of charity—that charity that “suffereth long and is kind;” and she saw that Anne Hall, when she was most disagreeable and hard, was often so because she felt keenly and deeply some false position into which her own headstrong will had placed her, and which she had not the nobleness to acknowledge; but as we did not make our own dispositions and characters, Madame Biète did not blame her more than she would have done had she possessed a minute turned-up nose instead of the Roman one which decorated Anne’s physiognomy. But though Madame Biète was never angry or offended with Anne, being only human, she sometimes had encounters with her; all the more mortifying to Anne Hall, because she was terribly in earnest, and Madame Biète was not.

Anne could make nothing of her. She asserted things in her usual positive manner, only to find the keen blue eyes dancing with amusement, and while a little bow closed a discussion, the corners of Madame Biète's mouth were curled with a decided expression of incredulity. Not only this, but Anne felt that her opponent saw her through and through; and sometimes after she had been vehemently maintaining, against her conviction, the truth of some theory she had taken up, she would find in a few minutes that Madame Biète had led her into so many contradictions that, to save herself from being palpably ridiculous, she was obliged to yield.

But the one point upon which Madame Biète could not forgive Anne was the way in which she would sometimes snub her mother, and spoil her pleasure for hours. To Madame Biète, strong, warm-hearted, and clever, there was something about Lady Hall that appealed to all her feelings of kindness and sympathy. She could hardly cease wondering at the utter unselfishness that enabled Lady Hall to put herself so entirely upon one side. She thought

she was one of the most loveable people she had ever met, and she took many opportunities of consoling her indirectly, without wounding her by showing her that she knew she required consolation.

Through Madame Biète, the Halls had made the acquaintance of a few people at Ortan-sur-Mer, including Madame Leroux and Monsieur Grandchamps; but the grand subject upon which Anne took her stand was the visit to Madame d'Estanville.

Poor Lady Hall's nights were sleepless. Sam had seen Mademoiselle d'Estanville twice since the adventure which had introduced him to the château, and Madame d'Estanville, enlightened on the subject of his perfect respectability, had yielded to the prepossession she had conceived in his favour, and had sent a polite message of welcome to his mother. And Lady Hall had not yet taken advantage of it; in spite of her own inclination, and of Sam's urgent remonstrances, Anne so far carried the day; and Sam, in sheer despair, went at length to Madame Biète, and confided his sister's stubbornness, and his own excessive ad-

miration; in short, told her much—so much that she knew everything before he had quite concluded.

She sympathized and talked to him to his heart's content; and when he had left, she sent for a carriage, and drove off to the Château d'Estanville.

She found Madame d'Estanville in a state of excitement and extreme satisfaction.

Adèle Morier had arrived. Adèle Morier was beautiful, refined, ladylike, and a genius! and poor Madame d'Estanville was in the seventh heaven. Her judgment, after all, had been right; and she had been so anxious, and Jacqueline had been so cross!

For some time Madame Biète was called upon to hear nothing but praises of the new inmate of the château, so she repressed the impatience which made her so anxious to speak about another matter, and allowed Madame d'Estanville to give full vent to her enthusiasm.

Then she began to talk about the Halls. What she wanted to know was whether, taking everything into consideration, the difference of

religion especially, Madame d'Estanville would or would not object to an admiration on the part of young Mr. Hall, that might end in something much more serious.

Madame Biète loved and respected Madame d'Estanville far too much to run the risk of wounding her by encouraging an affair she might not like; but she herself (though she did not know how very small an income the d'Estanvilles had) thought that a marriage between a young man of Sam's disposition, with a tolerable fortune, would be an advantage, and secure the happiness of her favourite. Still Madame d'Estanville might think differently; and as Madame Biète was not at all diplomatic, she sat, feeling aware of being much more puzzled how to extract what she wanted to know than she had realized till that moment.

Fortunately she was saved all trouble by the very open way in which Madame d'Estanville gave vent to her feelings about her daughter. The arrival of Adèle Morier had placed Marie, for the first time in her life, at a disadvantage in her mother's eyes. Adèle, polished, calm,

reticent, with a wonderful repose about her, was a strong contrast to the bright, laughing, vivacious girl of seventeen, with nothing to conceal, and a temperament that seemed to throw off anything sombre, as if instinctively.

Madame d'Estanville, unused for so long to that peculiar, well-trained, emotionless calm which Adèle possessed to so great a degree, felt as if Marie were rough and almost rude, by force of contrast; and though any unprejudiced person must have allowed that nothing could exceed the musical softness of Marie's laugh, as Adèle merely smiled, and did not laugh at all, Madame d'Estanville began to blame herself for having hitherto delighted in it.

"After all," she said, giving way to a burst of feeling usually kept down, "supposing my child perfection, what would it signify? what a fate lies before her if I die! what would become of her? Without fortune, what sort of marriage will she make? Ah! it is terrible to think about."

"Your old friends would not desert your orphan, and you are yet young," said Madame Biète, warmly.

"But I feel so old," said poor Madame d'Estanville; "I have lived every day of my life; I have had much to try me—ah! you do not know!" She paused for a few moments, and then began in a different voice: "You will laugh when I tell you of a romance that lately has been in my head; that rich young Englishman, if he ever loved Marie, what a marriage for her! How I should like him as my son!"

"Should you really?" said Madame Biète, much relieved. "You would like him though he is of a different faith—of a different nation?"

"It will never be," said Madame d'Estanville, almost sadly; "but when I contrast Monsieur Hall with those of my countrymen whom I remember—he is so open, so honest, and so manly! If my child had the fortune she ought to have, I do not say that I should prefer her marrying an Englishman, but as she will have no fortune, I think an English home—a '*vie de famille*'—would make her very happy, and she herself would never reconcile herself to a mere *mariage de convenance*. She is very

romantic, and has had no advantages," sighed poor Madame d'Estanville.

"And you think that even the difference of religion would not cause you to regret such a marriage?" asked Madame Biète, anxious to be quite certain of her views.

"How many of my countrymen have no religion at all!" exclaimed Madame d'Estanville. "How many are sceptical, and consider religion as a useful fable to frighten women and children, or console them, as the case may be. No," she said, with emotion, "I want, I wish, my child's life to be different from mine. I should die happy if I saw her married to a good man, for Marie's is not a common disposition. If she loves happily her life will be almost a paradise; if her heart is crushed, she will die."

Often and often did these words come before Madame Biète in after years; often and often did she think of them when after events enabled her to read the past in a different light.

She knew now all Madame d'Estanville wished, and they parted as usual, friends in more than name.

CHAPTER XVII.

MARIE D'ESTANVILLE, imaginative and romantic though she was, had been keenly alive to the great change that the arrival of Adèle Morier would bring into her home life. No plan could have been adopted by poor Madame d'Estanville so utterly at variance with her daughter's wishes ; but Marie was so generous and so anxious to crush down anything like jealousy or dislike, that she worked herself up into a belief that she should find a congenial companion ; and when Adèle arrived, the welcome given her by mother and daughter was one calculated to revive and raise the drooping spirits of the afflicted orphan.

But Marie d'Estanville, after the first agitation and awkwardness of the meeting was over, was conscious of being completely and

thoroughly disappointed. Adèle Morier was only twenty-five, but she might have been forty, so far as her perfect self-possession and complete aplomb were concerned : she was even a little patronising in her tone towards Marie, patted her shoulder, and kissed her forehead ; called her “ *mon enfant*,” at the first outset, and scanned her eager and brilliant face with a scrutiny that made Marie turn away with almost a feeling of indignation.

But to Madame d'Estanville her manner was a very different thing. No subject could have shown more humility towards his sovereign than she displayed towards the *Châtelaine* of d'Estanville. If Madame d'Estanville spoke, Adèle listened with a profound silence, that was too deferential and marked not to be noticed ; and poor Madame d'Estanville was touched in her weakest point, and succumbed directly. As the days went on, things did not improve in Marie's opinion. Adèle, with a gentleness and suavity that was indescribable, began to take up one by one the little things which had belonged hitherto to Marie alone.

“ Your time is too valuable, my child, to be

wasted in these things," she would say, as she would arrange the flowers, with a skill quite equal to Marie's; and if Marie remonstrated, Adèle, with an angelic smile, and a look of complete indifference as to the result, would ask Madame d'Estanville if she minded her doing this; Marie ought to be industrious, and not trifle away her time: upon which Marie would be lectured by her mother, and told how wise was the new companion.

Marie could not relieve her feelings to Jacqueline, because she was obliged to keep her as calm as she could. Her feelings towards Mademoiselle Morier were those of the most rooted dislike. In her anxiety to take possession of everything and everybody at the château, Mademoiselle Morier had actually suggested a different way of making Madame's chocolate. Jacqueline, choking with indignation, had been told by Madame d'Estanville to ask Mademoiselle Morier to show her this way. "We in the country go on in our old humdrum way," she said; "in Paris they have the first ideas;" and Jacqueline submitted, and hated Mademoiselle Morier from that moment with a

cordial hatred that was increased by the fact that the chocolate was a success, and was economical: had it been a failure Jacqueline might have forgiven her!

To Monsieur de Pendarves alone could Marie indulge her sentiments, and to him she poured forth all that she could not understand, with an openness that taught him at one and the same moment how much she trusted and confided in him, and how remote from her idea was the possibility of any warmer feeling for him.

"I am not jealous, but it is so hard," said poor Marie. "Not a morning now that I can arrive first in my mother's room: the moment her bell sounds I fly; no matter, Adèle is always there, looking calm and unruffled; and she asks where I have been with a look of reproach, as much as to say, 'She is not *my* mother, and yet I come to her immediately.' I am beginning to lose my mother's confidence; I shall very soon be only second in her affections."

"Never," said Monsieur de Pendarves, consolingly; "it is only for a time, my little one;

and as for this young lady I detest her, I cannot suffer her."

"Do you think her pretty?" asked Marie, a little consoled.

"Pretty, no; particularly ugly," said Monsieur de Pendarves. "She reminds me of a calf's head. Never mind, child, it is only for a time;" and Monsieur de Pendarves would rejoice in Marie's laugh, and consoled her as much as he could. He might, it is true, have pointed out the great advantages Marie was having; her playing was improving considerably; but he did not approve of Mademoiselle Morier: he was very straightforward, and Mademoiselle Morier, like every one who tries to be "all things to all men," sometimes changed her opinions, and showed, by the utter inconsistency of her arguments, that she had no fixed principles, but argued to suit the exigencies of the moment and the character of the person she was talking to.

In one thing Jacqueline's predictions about her want of beauty were wrong; Adèle had a pale face, marvellous in its absence of colour, and was, though not pretty, very refined and

interesting-looking ; and though Monsieur de Pendarves did not admire her Madame d'Estanville did.

In the mean time, Monsieur de Belleville found his correspondence with Madame d'Estanville utterly beyond his comprehension. She wrote him notes in which she contradicted herself so often, that a much wiser head than his would have found it difficult to follow her.

It dawned upon him by degrees that there was only one thing to do—they must have an interview ; he must either go to Ortan-sur-Mer or the château ; and he was not inclined to go to the latter place, because he had his own notions of the obligations it might put him under.

A letter from Monsieur Maître's lawyer put poor Madame d'Estanville into a fever of anxiety, and her despatch was so urgent, that Monsieur de Belleville saw the time for action had arrived, and that something must be done at once ; and as it suited his convenience in other ways, to be hereafter mentioned, he resigned himself with the air of a martyr to rusticate for a given time.

CHAPTER XIX.

MONSIEUR LE COMTE DE BELLEVILLE thought it best to go down to Ortan-sur-Mer and instal himself in the hotel, from whence he despatched a note to his fair cousin, as he still persisted in addressing her, intimating his intention of paying her a visit on the following morning.

Madame d'Estanville was pleased when she found him so promptly coming to her aid, and talked pleasantly to Adèle about the old times and old associations this visit naturally brought up. Marie, her little head almost in a whirl, by events succeeding so closely to each other after long years of the quietest monotony, sat listening, but only half taking in all that her mother was saying. What would have

interested her very much a few days ago was not particularly interesting to her now. What was an elderly Count, older even than her mother, and a relation, to be compared to a real English hero, such as Monsieur Hall?

Next morning found Madame d'Estanville and the Count once more face to face after the lapse of years. Madame d'Estanville, with her hair prematurely grey, and without one artificial assistance against the ravages of time, looked, in reality, far younger than the Count, whose unnaturally black hair and whiskers showed off the withered complexion, as it always does. Besides, the early hours and the calm and quiet of the country life had retained in Madame d'Estanville's appearance that freshness that departs so soon under the influence of want of sleep, want of fresh air, and all the numerous "wants" of artificial life. Monsieur le Comte was pleased to find her looking so much more what he remembered her than she had led him to expect. If she looked like this, he himself must not be so old-looking as he had feared, and this conviction covered him with complacency.

The Count, with eyes noting signs of poverty in everything surrounding the house, had come to the conclusion that Monsieur Maître's proposal was not half so bad a one as even he had thought. Here was evidently great want of means—there was plenty offered on the other hand, and though the connection was certainly not good, yet in these days of rapid fortune-making, &c., these things were done every day, and such a marriage would solve every difficulty.

But somehow when he looked into Madame d'Estanville's face, Monsieur de Belleville began to feel over again only the objectionable part of the proposal; and he crossed and recrossed his feet, and cleared his throat several times before he succeeded in plucking up his courage. At last, pulling his chair a little nearer Madame d'Estanville, and leaning a little forward, he said gently, "Now for the important question of your present difficulty!"

"Ah!" said Madame d'Estanville, "yes, it is indeed better to go into that at once."

"Do you know, my dear Madame, who the creditor is that now claims this money?"

"He is not a creditor. My husband owed nothing," said Madame d'Estanville, vehemently.

The Count carefully changed the position of his feet.

"I ask if you know who it is (whether justly or unjustly is beside the question) who claims this money?"

"I neither know nor care; he is quite wrong if he supposes he will get it," she answered, vehemently.

"My dear Madame d'Estanville——"

"My dear Monsieur de Belleville, I know that my husband could not have owed this money, otherwise I should have seen some memorandum of it. Heaven knows that the list of his debts was long enough! Oh!" she exclaimed, turning with moistened eyes towards him, "if you knew how hard it was then to find out all—if you knew how scrupulously I sacrificed everything then to save his name—you would know now how cruel it is to have the subject recurred to—how bitter a thing it is to have that renewed I hoped for ever had been laid to sleep."

She spoke so earnestly that Monsieur de Belleville's eyes were moistened with an unusual feeling. He coughed again. "This country air," he said to himself, "quite takes away one's self-command."

"Chère Madame," he said, "I assure you, were I here only to convince you of your ruin, you would see me far sadder in aspect than I am, but I come provided with a remedy. Will you believe this, and hear me patiently?"

Madame d'Estanville bowed her head.

"When I received your letter it puzzled me a good deal, I confess. You will forgive my reminding you that you insisted throughout upon the fact of your husband's not being indebted, without bringing forward one single proof that such was not the case. Well, I was puzzling over what my course had best be, when one day I received a card and a message from an unknown person. Jean saw him, and in short, after a little consideration, I received him. He was the creditor."

"So-called," put in Madame d'Estanville.
"Yes, he is Monsieur Maître."

"So-called!" echoed the Count, with a little wave of his hand. "I am not much used to business, but I soon began to see that the man before me was not only a man of business, but a very shrewd man of business, with (I may add) a very proper and befitting respect and deference for his superiors. He came, my dear cousin, on purpose to lay before me a proposition, which, if I approved of, I was to bring to you. Before doing so, I felt that it was necessary to know exactly where we stood, and in order to do this I sent for my man of business, and put the thing into his hands."

"And he said, of course, this claim was nothing," said Madame d'Estanville, with a disdainful curl of the lip.

"He found it valid," said the Count, lowering his voice a little; and seeing Madame d'Estanville's white face, he added hastily, "remember, I have a remedy."

Madame d'Estanville hardly heard him. She needed all her courage to bear this blow. Remedy! what remedy could do away with the fact that she had sacrificed her fortune for

nothing, and that she and her child were homeless and penniless?

She was not a woman who gave way much to tears; tears were wrung from her by anguish, and were no relief. Such tears forced themselves from her poor tired eyes then, but she would not give way; only the shortened breath and the whitened lips spoke of the intense anxiety, of the great suffering.

Monsieur de Belleville looked at her, and admired her courage. "How good blood shows itself under trial," he said to himself; "an ordinary woman of the middle classes would have sobbed and screamed like a baby."

"You must be patient," he continued, kindly; "you must hear me out."

"Patient!" poor Madame d'Estanville pressed her hands together.

"I have seen the — well, the so-called creditor," said Monsieur de Belleville; "he is young, good-looking, and ambitious."

There was a silence; Monsieur de Belleville wished Madame d'Estanville would speak.

"He wants to improve his position—to make a connection," said Monsieur de Belleville—

who was fast getting angry, on finding how difficult it was to say all he had intended to say, and how small an effect he produced ; “he is enormously rich—he wishes to marry.”

“Qu’ est-ce que cela me fait ?” said Madame d’Estanville, indifferently.

The Count looked at her, and dealt his last stroke.

“He wishes to marry Mademoiselle d’Estanville.”

Madame d’Estanville rose erect. She spoke low and passionately. “I do not accuse you,” she said, “of coming here purposely to insult me, but you do not know this man’s antecedents. Do you know who he is—this man who seeks to marry Mademoiselle d’Estanville, and who persuades you to be his ambassador ? He is the son of the valet, rogue, usurer, and scoundrel who led my husband into all the evil that resulted in his ruin and mine. Yes ; it remained only this, that he should insult me. What can I do ?”

The Count was very uneasy in his mind. This was a very disagreeable fact, and his first impulse was a wish to kick Monsieur Maître

anywhere, but a great deal depended upon *who knew all this*, and if this plan fell to the ground what was to become of Madame d'Estanville and her daughter? Swiftly through the Count's mind there passed all the possible consequences—always taking into account the effect of these consequences upon himself—and the more he thought the more difficult did the solution appear.

He looked at Madame d'Estanville's dress; it was shabby, and positively there was a darn in a conspicuous part of its very front. That darn spoke more to the Count's fastidiousness than any one knows. A rent would have affected him less; a darn was a premeditated reparation, speaking painfully first of the age of the gown, and next of the poverty of the wearer.

That fact decided him. No woman in her senses reduced to such straits (and how different from her life in former days!) could persist in rejecting, as an insult, an offer which in all but one thing—connection—was so unexceptionable. He would urge nothing now, he would temporize, and merely guiding mat-

ters behind the scenes, would apparently leave all alone.

“My dear cousin,” he said, gravely, “I am vexed beyond expression at having been the means of affecting you so deeply, and of calling up so much emotion. I live so much in the world that I am forced to go with the tide; and I forget that you, leading a life of complete seclusion, must necessarily cling to your old traditions. Since the time when you made one of us, the world has completely changed. Men without a grandfather, or perhaps a father to their knowledge, are now the men who feast and entertain the descendants of princes, and so long as his menu is good, we do not inquire too critically into his parentage. The daughters of rich men, who made their money anyhow, are received with open arms by the haughtiest of us all. Things are much changed—indeed are changing every day.”

“Possibly!” said Madame d'Estanville.

The Count looked at her. “At all events,” he said, “for my sake you will do one thing; you must see this young man yourself; give him your refusal with your own lips.”

"What do you say?" asked Madame d'Estanville, as if she hardly heard aright.

"You must receive Monsieur Maître here, and give him his answer," said the Count, firmly.

"Monsieur de Belleville!"

"Madame, have just a little patience, and listen to me. Why make this man your enemy for life? Supposing him to be the evil one himself, where is the use of driving him to extremities? If you receive him, and let him know you have other views—put it into one of your feminine bon-bons, and give it him wrapped up in civility, no harm ensues; whereas," said the Count, with great emphasis, "if I give him his answer, he may imagine something upon my part has been wanting, and, in short, he may take some opportunity and make himself unpleasant to *me*, which would not suit me in any way;" and the Count, settling his head in his stock, looked at his feet, and again carefully changed their attitude.

The intense selfishness of her noble cousin struck upon Madame d'Estanville's heart with

a sort of surprise. Living away from people, and reading that sort of literature which dates now from nearly a century ago, and where chivalry and the most highflown notions of devotion and disinterestedness are treated as matters of everyday occurrence, she forgot that actually, as a rule, selfishness is the characteristic quality of a man living for himself, like M. de Belleville. Before she had time to say a word, he was again speaking to her, this time in a tone of reproach.

"I have come all this distance," he said, "on purpose to suit your convenience, and you not only will not take my advice, but after all the sacrifices I have made, you positively will not make the slightest move to assist me: Madame, it is not right."

"Monsieur de Belleville, if I were sure of myself—if I were sure that I would only see in him a suitor for the hand of Marie, whose position rendered him unacceptable, I would see him; but I know that if I receive him, I shall not be able to master my indignation! It will all come back. The insolence, the wickedness of the father, and the continued

insolence and wickedness of the son. Yes!" she exclaimed, "the son is only trying to finish what the father began."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the Count, pettishly; "why look at it in such an exaggerated light? Why, Madame, if we all looked at things as you do, it would create untold confusion; nobody would be left to shake hands with anybody. Everybody's father has done something to somebody, if it were inquired into; and here, where it is a real matter of consequence to forget, why not forget? After all the sacrifice I have made of my time, and my convenience, and various other things, I think, I do think," said the Count, impressively, "that I have a right to request you to see this young man and dismiss him civilly."

Madame d'Estanville looked at him. Where was the use of expecting such a man to enter into her feelings, or of moving him in any way? She would contend no farther: "I will see him," she said, bending her head, as if tacitly acknowledging her defeat; and the Count rose to depart, triumphant at having gained so much. It was a beginning, he thought, and

accepting Madame's invitation to return to dinner, when he was to be introduced to Marie, he bowed over her hand with an air of the profoundest respect, and departed.

CHAPTER XX.

MADAME D'ESTANVILLE remained, after Monsieur de Belleville's departure, in a perfect confusion of misery. How blank and bleak appeared the prospect round her—ruin, absolute and inevitable! Even supposing she consented to sacrifice her feelings, and to allow such a marriage, could she expect her high-spirited daughter to accept so wretched a fate? In the midst of all this sorrow came the reflection that she had asked the Count to dinner, and that she had better tell Jacqueline of this fact, if she expected to have anything ready for him.

This practical necessity did her good; she rose and went to find her faithful housekeeper; coming upon her finally as she stood shading

her eyes with her two hands, watching the retreating carriage with an air of unmistakable satisfaction. "It would have been just like Madame to have asked Monsieur le Comte to dinner!" she said aloud. "What a great relief to see him depart with so little fuss!"

"My poor Jacqueline," exclaimed Madame d'Estanville, with a melancholy smile, "I *have* asked him to dinner."

Jacqueline's face was a picture of respectful reproach.

"And there is nothing, positively nothing in the house!" she exclaimed, in accents of dismay.

"Then we must get something," answered her mistress, calmly, who never could realize this sort of difficulties, and who just now was oppressed with cares so much more real, so frightful in their nature.

"Send Antoine to Ortan-sur-Mer, and bid him get something; you must give him the money. I do not think I happen to have any just now."

"Not an uncommon thing," thought Jacqueline, and then she said aloud, in a tone

of wounded dignity—"Madame of course knows; but shall Antoine order dinner at a restaurant?"

"As you will," said Madame d'Estanville, absently.

Jacqueline nearly boiled over. If there was one thing above another that she prided herself upon, it was the perfection of her cookery. Already her active mind had run over the various things she could do, and now she was calmly told that a restaurant dinner was to be the order of the day.

"Madame will perhaps write her orders," she said, as she flattened her back, and her dark eyes flashed. "Knowing what a restaurant's dinner generally consists of, I should not like to have any responsibility, especially as Monsieur le Comte de Belleville is known to be fastidious to a degree."

"My good Jacqueline," said Madame d'Estanville, "what a fuss you make about the dinner of a man who will forget it directly. Send for anything, cooked or uncooked, I really do not care; only as I have much to think of, if you want to consult any one,

consult Mademoiselle Morier: she will help you much better than I can."

"My opinion is," said Jacqueline, "that if Monsieur was inflicted with a dinner such as Madame proposes he would not forget it in a hurry. I think he might probably have cause to remember it: however, only one other thing, and I have done. What am I to do about Mademoiselle d'Estanville's toilette?"

"What do you mean, Jacqueline?"

"Madame is not aware that Mademoiselle has nothing fit to put on—hem! hem!—that is, she grows out of all her things. Madame would wish Monsieur le Comte to see her to advantage?"

"But there is no time," said poor Madame d'Estanville, who could hardly force herself to attend to all this just now.

"I take a liberty, but Madame will pardon it," said Jacqueline, very meekly; "but Madame's beautiful white dresses—I feel sure that a little trouble would make them fit Mademoiselle. There is also some lace."

"Oh, Jacqueline!" exclaimed her mistress, impatiently, "do what you like, and as you

like, only leave me alone, like a good woman ; my head aches terribly."

Jacqueline had said all she wished, and gained her point. It might be that Monsieur le Comte would be so struck by Mademoiselle's beauty, dressed as Jacqueline meant her to be dressed, that he would look over that little defect, the want of fortune.

She wished very much indeed she had any chance of finding out what his fortune was. "If I asked his valet he would naturally tell me a story," she said to herself, "and no one here knows anything about him."

She went off to find Mademoiselle Morier ; and taking her to Madame's wardrobe of things laid by, they found some white dresses and plenty of black lace ; and merely telling her that Madame wished Mademoiselle to have something arranged for her, Jacqueline betook herself to her kitchen.

In the mean time the arrival of Monsieur de Belleville at Ortan-sur-Mer was a fact that became known almost immediately to all the inhabitants.

He was reported as fabulously rich, thanks

to Jean's industrious tongue, and tradespeople and visitors were almost equally interested in his presence there, the former hoping he had come to spend his money, the latter that he had come to spend his time amongst them.

The small and old-fashioned hotel that struggled not unsuccessfully against the plate-glass windows, architectural disfigurements, and enormous prices of its rival, had the honour of receiving Monsieur le Comte, and the waiters tripped each other up as they endeavoured to prove their anxiety to be ubiquitous in his service. It was a shock to discover that the Count required no dinner; still, his stay was undecided, and this was some consolation; and in the mean time it was evident that he was a man of the very highest fashion, and this would prove to all who might see his name in the visitors' book that the hotel had still *some* claims to the aristocratic pretensions it put forth.

Having seen his room, and carefully removed some dust from his person, the Count sallied forth with the matchless, lounging air of the

man of the world, to whom time is a matter of no consequence, who never was and never will be in a hurry, and who gazes with a calm and settled expression upon all that meets his eye, as much as to say, "There is nothing new left for me to see, and very little to admire." With his martial step and air of sublime indifference, he sauntered up the principal street, perfectly aware of the amount of attention he was exciting—creating a general feeling in the breasts of those he passed that he was some foreign prince upon his travels; and finally paused before the shop window of the principal barber, hairdresser, and perfumer—no less a person, in short, than Monsieur Alphonse Caumont.

Monsieur Caumont, with a quickness that was the result of long practice, saw at once that Monsieur de Belleville was a man differing from other men, and that he must be spoken to in a different way. He was no ordinary visitor, and he wondered not a little what brought him there.

Monsieur Caumont had seen men quite as fashionable, and quite as well dressed; but

never any one who seemed so perfectly indifferent to everything going on round him; and, indeed, this expression of total indifference was one great reason of Monsieur de Belleville's success in the world.

It stood the Count in the stead of brains, of talent, of memory, of everything in which he was deficient. "He was capable of doing anything and everything, if he cared to do so," was the universal opinion of the world; and this constant and supreme indifference was accepted as a proof of superiority.

He now extracted from Monsieur Caumont's willing tongue every scrap of information he wanted about Ortan-sur-Mer and its neighbourhood, while he listened apparently as though the subject concerned him not. Of course Monsieur Caumont mentioned Lady Hall, and the enormous wealth of Mademoiselle, making but slight mention of the son, with whom, indeed, he was not personally acquainted; but, as before said, the result of Anne's position at home was a general belief among the Ortanites that she had all the fortune—otherwise her place would be a less prominent one

in a house with her mother and brother, who by rights came before her.

“Virtue is often its own reward,” said the Count to himself, pleasantly, as he turned away, leaving a most favourable impression on the mind of Monsieur Caumont, and an order for pomatum, which Jean and his own wig would probably share between them. “I came down out of pure benevolence, and because I wanted to get away from my worries; I may return home with an English wife possessed (as they always are) of every virtue under the sun, the ugliest clothes in existence, and an enormous fortune; not so bad.” And the Count, in a temper so sweet as to fill Jean with apprehension about him, dressed most carefully, and returned to the château prepared to make himself more agreeable than ever to Madame d'Estanville, and the young “country cousin” he had never seen.

CHAPTER XXI.

AMONGST other things in which Anne Hall showed her usual unwillingness to be guided by the advice of anybody, and particularly that of Madame Biète, was in the matter of servants.

The Halls had found it so difficult to get any French cook to undertake the English service, that they had sent to England for one. Understanding neither the charcoal fires, nor the hundred and one differences that exist, she had lost the patience she had, and had returned to England in a few days, and the Halls—whose lives had hitherto been as free as those of rich people generally are from petty worries—found themselves in great straits.

There is an unjust cry about French servants, arising in a great measure from want of thought : English people going to France for a limited time cannot expect the best class of French servants to give up their places, and go to them, to be turned adrift at the end of the season, especially when the enormous difference and complications of the English ways are taken into account. In the French households, coffee, and bread and butter, or little rolls, sometimes replaced by chocolate, is served in your own room ; then one mid-day meal, consisting of everything you can think of, is served at eleven to one, and afterwards goes to the servants. The dinner is in the same way, and consequently the incessant cooking that goes on from morning till night is a thing a Frenchwoman cannot stand. Those people, therefore, who insist on keeping up English habits only succeed in getting those foreign servants whose characters and antecedents prevent their ever getting into French service. Without the convenience of an English kitchen, which lightens its immense labour in some degree, the result is confusion

and a total failure, and after a sort of hopeless scramble, an immense waste, and often actual robbery, a cry is raised against the French servants as a class, and the whole suffer in reputation from the evil doing of their worst representatives.

Anne Hall, who never would allow that she was incapable of judging for herself, took into their service a plausible, good-looking woman, who won her heart by referring perpetually to the fact of Mademoiselle's superior knowledge of French and evident long residence in the country.

"But she has no character, my dear," said Lady Hall, who felt very uncomfortable about it.

"How can she have a character, since she has never been in service?" returned Anne. "She has had terrible misfortunes, otherwise she would still be independent of service."

So Victoire arrived, and did wonders. Her cooking was good, indeed excellent. She managed to satisfy the English servants, and Anne pointed triumphantly to the good judgment which had secured a treasure in spite of

prejudices, when one day she received a note from Madame Biète.

Madame Biète requested more urgently than she had ever before requested anything of Anne, that she would come and lunch with her without rousing Lady Hall's suspicions that anything unusual had occurred. Something had happened, and she must see Anne immediately if possible, otherwise, very unwillingly, she must go to Lady Hall.

Anne Hall cogitated and was flattered. Yes, even Madame Biète had come to see that it was better, in matters of importance, to consult her; and, much to Lady Hall's surprise, and Sam's private amusement, she announced her intention of going to lunch with the woman she had hitherto systematically abused:

Madame Biète saw the gaunt figure of Anne Hall enter the porte cochère, and a feeling almost of pity took possession of her. This girl, with her intense self-conceit and reliance upon her own judgment, would have a terrible awakening some day, and the very subject on which she was now to be enlightened was a disagreeable thing. Only because

Madame Biète thought it right did she meddle in this matter, and it required all her sense of what was due from her towards Lady Hall to enable her to face the subject.

Anne Hall lunched and enjoyed it, and not till she had finished, and that the two were seated in the little garden close to the house did Madame Biète begin the disagreeable subject in question. "I am sorry to have anything unpleasant to tell you, my dear Miss Hall," she said, "but it would be wrong and impossible for me to sit quietly by and see you victimized."

"I am obliged to you," said Anne, coldly.

"I am sorry to tell you that you are much deceived in Victoire; she is a woman of very bad character."

"I know you dislike her," said Anne Hall, with rising anger; "but though she may not be a protégée of yours she suits me—us," she said, angrily, correcting herself; "and that being the case, I must beg you to let the subject drop."

Madame Biète paused irresolute, and her next question somewhat surprised Anne.

"Does the household linen belong to you or to your mother?" she asked.

"To my mother and brother," said Anne, stiffly, opening her eyes, and raising her eyebrows.

"To your mother and brother; I must speak to them, then," said Madame Biète. "I must apologize for having considered it a subject fitter for your ears than for those of Lady Hall. I wished to save her annoyance; this must be my excuse."

"Having said so much, I must insist upon your saying more," said Anne Hall, whose temper was rising rapidly.

"Insist!" Madame Biète's blue eyes confronted Anne, and shamed her—a little.

"I cannot choose my words," she said, answering the look of dignified astonishment. "Well, then, I beg."

"Victoire is selling it as fast as possible," said Madame Biète. "You had better look it over."

"I do not believe it," said Anne, angrily.

Madame Biète rose quietly, and taking a parcel from a table in the room placed it in Anne's hands. "I think that is your mother's,"

she said, and Anne, angry and confused, saw one of the finest of her mother's cherished table cloths before her. Even yet she would not give in. "It may not be Victoire," she said, but her voice fell a little.

"If you choose to go into it, I can bring forward the person she sold it to, and who brought it to me. Victoire said you had given it to her. There is, I am afraid, a great deal of it gone."

Anne Hall was silent. Nothing would vex Lady Hall so much as this, she knew. Lady Hall valued the fine old linen almost as she valued her old lace. It had belonged to her, and was to belong to her son, and never had she been so roused as when she found that the French method of washing was destroying her things. She had bought a quantity of French linen, and had put hers away.

"The fact is," continued Madame Biète, "that Victoire is well known, if only you had made inquiries; she drinks dreadfully, and has lost one place after another, simply because the goodness of her cooking did not make up for the badness of her character."

"She has never been in service before," said Anne Hall.

Madame Biète smiled, and put a note into Anne Hall's hands.

It was written by Victoire herself, and addressed to the keeper of a small café, to whom she was heavily indebted.

"MONSIEUR,

"You do wrong to reproach me, for after all my misfortunes I am now in paradise, with a rich lady without one grain of suspicion in her character, completely led by the nose by her daughter, a young person of much savageness of disposition, who effectually keeps off my enemies from enlightening her. I have, as you know, been unfortunate from my losing so many places, entirely owing to that bad habit of French ladies, who come prying into everything, and who always managed to arrive at the most inconvenient moments. Long live the English, say I. I am making a harvest; they know nothing about the weights, nothing about the prices, and the young lady (who is detested in the house) is delightfully

original, and quite convinced that I am perfection. After last night my head aches. I am sure my last bottle of Geneviève was of the second quality. There is no trusting the world, and this is a great misfortune. I send you ten francs on account. Be quite tranquil ; in another month my dreadful young lady and her poor mamma will return to their fogs, and I shall be rich. Heaven is very kind, and I shall pay my debts."

Anne Hall's face got very white as she read this, but she merely said, "Thank you. May I keep it?"

"I only wish to serve you," said Madame Biète, kindly; "and I will try and trace the linen for you; it might be brought back. I suppose you would like to get it back quietly?"

"Thank you," again said Anne Hall.

"I hear your brother has made the acquaintance of Madame d'Estanville," said Madame Biète, easily turning the subject of conversation to introduce one she was very anxious to introduce.

Anne Hall, thinking more of her discovery

than of her brother, answered "Yes" very absently.

"He may think himself fortunate," continued Madame Biète, "to have achieved by accident what years might not have done for him."

"What do you mean?" asked Anne, stiff with astonishment.

"I mean an introduction to Madame d'Estanville," answered Madame Biète, coolly. "Even I, knowing her so well, and being able to vouch for your respectability, should not have ventured to present you to her, only I wish"—here she paused, as though not quite knowing in what way she could say what she wanted to say.

"Pray say what you were going to say," said Anne, grandly; "you wished——"

"I wish that the introduction extended to yourselves," said Madame Biète; "but though Madame d'Estanville has been extremely kind to your brother, I am afraid the acquaintance will end there."

"I certainly was not aware," said Anne, haughtily, "that the honour of her acquaintance was so great, or so very difficult to obtain."

"She is one of the most charming people possible," said Madame Biète, thoughtfully—"quite one of those people it does one good to know; but she has so entirely given up society, that I am afraid she will never leave her retirement again."

"As she seems to have a grown up-daughter, she may probably now be glad to seek society again," said Anne. "How else will she marry her?"

Madame Biète's eyes expressed both amusement and astonishment; but before she had time to answer, Madame Leroux, indignant, ruffled, and in her morning costume, puffed into the room.

"You see me suffocating, choking—positively choking with indignation," she exclaimed, scarcely noticing Anne in her overpowering wrath.

"What has happened?"

"You ask me what has happened!" and Madame Leroux, hot, dusty, dirty, in the shabbiest gown she possessed (and this was saying a good deal), absolutely panted for breath. "My house is going to be pulled down! There! and Mon-

sieur le Maire says, 'Madame, it is all your own fault;' and why do you suppose it is to be pulled down? Because the English are going to have an hotel there; I am to be houseless. I am to be rendered miserable because of an hotel for the English."

"And how is it your fault?" asked Madame Biète.

"It is not my fault, it is my misfortune," screamed Madame Leroux; "I merely said the street must be drained, and drew up a memorandum of all the illnesses I could hear of, which I enormously exaggerated, of course; well, these wise men, these makers of laws say, as the street is so bad it will give to our town a reputation of unwholesomeness; we must alter this: they offer the ground next it for sale, an English company look at it, poke about, go off to Paris, manage to arrange all with la liste civile, come back, poof, they have bought it all, bought the street itself from the crown. Already workmen swarm, and falling bricks make everything dangerous. Oh! I am positively in a fever; I shall die, I know I shall die; I would die to-morrow, only that I know

Monsieur le Maire would feel rather glad, and I shall live, therefore, on purpose to provoke him."

Madame Biète, knowing what an evil this street had been to the town, could not help feeling glad, but she turned the conversation, hoping to direct Madame Leroux's thoughts from her present trouble, and purposely spoke to her of Madame d'Estanville, and of young Mr. Hall's adventure.

As she expected, Madame Leroux immediately dashed into the subject after her own fashion: "Madame d'Estanville received your brother, *je n'en reviens pas*," she said; "wonders will never cease. He may after this write upon his tombstone: 'I have penetrated the seclusion of the most proud, most mighty of all the princesses.' Why I, though my mother was own cousin to the de Bertronvilles, and you know what they were," she said, turning to Madame Biète, "have never yet gone further than a respectful curtsy."

"Mademoiselle Hall thinks now Mademoiselle d'Estanville is grown up, the prospect of marrying her may make a difference in Madame

d'Estanville's views about society," said Madame Biète, quaintly.

Madame Leroux laughed. "Mademoiselle Hall is not aware of the manners and customs of people in Madame d'Estanville's position in life," she said, to Anne's secret indignation. "Probably Mademoiselle d'Estanville has been betrothed from childhood to one of her own noble cousins; these things among that class are affaires de famille entirely."

Anne Hall rose to take leave: she had not a sufficiently generous temper to express any sense of gratitude towards Madame Biète for the way in which she had opened her eyes, but Madame Biète did not mind. She had done her duty, and she knew she had gained her point. Anne Hall would call upon Madame d'Estanville, merely because Madame Biète had considered her doing so an impossibility.

CHAPTER XXII.

WHILE Monsieur de Belleville was disporting himself at Ortan-sur-Mer, and was gathering information from various sources about the newly-arrived inhabitants—information which, it is needless to say, was as much mixed up with falsehood as is usually the case, Madame d'Estanville sat in her pretty room, her face even paler than usual, and that weary pain at her heart that rendered her almost incapable of attending to anything going on round her.

All her thoughts were concentrated on the terrible position in which she stood. On one hand ruin, absolute and complete: to sell the old château was ruin, it would make her homeless. Inch by inch every morsel of the old property had been sold—sold to the very gates ;

nothing now remained but the park—small enough—barely sufficient to afford pasture to the few cows they kept. Once this gone (and would this suffice?), she and Marie would be homeless, and without the means of finding or making a home. Madame d'Estanville could do nothing to gain a livelihood, and Marie—— On the other hand, if she could bring herself to look over the terrible objections to Monsieur Maître, she felt that to attempt to persuade her daughter to marry a man whose name had been held in horror by the household would be utterly useless. What was she to do?

Was she to be forced, after years of seclusion and self-denial, after proudly rejecting every offer from her relations that might infringe upon her independence—was she now to turn meekly to them and sue for that help once scorned?

One moment, and only for a moment, her mind glanced at the emotion shown by Monsieur de Pendarves, but here again she felt how terribly difficult her position was. She was far too high-spirited herself to think of becoming

dependent upon him. She could not bear urging Marie into an uncongenial marriage. She had married without affection, and her life had been years of repentance : she was feverishly anxious that Marie's life should be happy, different from her own : besides, she recognized in her daughter a far greater degree of sentiment than she herself had ever possessed. Marie's passionate nature could not curb itself into a cold spirit of duty : with her everything was keenly felt, and made her happiness or her misery ; indeed, her outbursts of feeling (though she was learning to control them) had, as a child, positively frightened her mother, who, with feelings quick enough of her own, yet required a good deal to stir those feelings into anything approaching Marie's in violence or intensity.

So Madame d'Estanville, while the bright sun was glinting softly through the shaded windows of the conservatory, sat listening with an ever-increasing sadness to the sweet voice of her daughter, who was arranging and rearranging the flowers, and singing to herself with that exquisitely sympathetic voice she possessed, in

the unconscious and easy manner that speaks more plainly than anything else on earth of a happy heart—a heart wholly and entirely free from the shadow of any sorrow.

So absorbed was she that she did not notice Adèle come quietly into the room, and, after a little gesture to Marie, the two went off together.

A short time afterwards and Madame d'Estanville was effectually roused from her reverie. Marie stood before her, the colour in her face heightened by the sort of half consciousness of her great beauty, and a sweet, shy look was in her eyes as if beseeching her mother's favourable judgment. Poor Madame d'Estanville! almost for the first time she realized how lovely that daughter was, whose future was so dark and so dim. In a soft white muslin dress, with a black lace fichu crossed over her bosom, a crimson rose peeping out of her wavy hair, Marie (ordinarily dressed in high plain dresses, never attempting any ornament) was almost like a vision to her mother. As she looked at her, and remembered all now weighing upon her heart, her calmness gave way, she held

out her arms, and taking Marie to her as if she were still a little child, she burst into an agony of tears.

Both Marie and Adèle, who stood by, pleased with the success of her skill, were terribly frightened. Madame d'Estanville was not in the least a person who gave way to tears, and never could Marie remember such signs of emotion.

"Maman chérie," she whispered, "how thoughtless of me! this dress has revived old recollections. I will take it off."

"No, oh no!" said poor Madame d'Estanville; "it is not that, but——"

Adèle quietly went for Jacqueline, who was engaged with head, tongue, and hands in preparing the Count's dinner. She tossed off her apron and rushed up stairs, ready to scold her mistress for risking the dinner by so inconvenient an interruption; but the expression of misery was so pitifully written in Madame d'Estanville's face that she went forward in a subdued manner, and busied herself in preparing one of those numberless concoctions invariably used in France. Before this was administered, every one stared at the unwonted sound of the

front-door bell rang through the house. Madame d'Estanville went to her room to bathe her eyes and remove all traces of her emotion, thinking that it was the Count, who had found Ortan-sur-Mer less enlivening than he had expected, and resolved to give him no reason to believe her incapable of self-command.

It was, however, not Monsieur de Belleville who had interrupted the scene in the old château, but Lady Hall, her daughter, and Sam.

After what had passed with the son, Madame d'Estanville did not feel justified in excusing herself from receiving the mother; but it was almost beyond her facing these strangers while she was weighed down with anxiety and unhappiness.

But the spirit of her race helped her : she was not going to sit down with her misery and allow it to crush her ; she was not going to allow the world to read the cruel story of her husband's want of every consideration written in her face ; and when she passed out of her room into the adjoining one, no one could have detected in the calm and quiet manner, or the

composed face, anything save the courtesy and kindness she felt towards people of whom the only specimen she knew had given her so favourable an impression.

Never had poor Lady Hall shown to greater disadvantage; she had undergone more than one lecture from Anne upon the propriety of being "distant and dignified," knowing well that had her life depended upon it she could be neither; she had been scolded for Sam's adventure as if she had really been at the bottom of it; and all the way along the lovely drive up the valley Anne had dilated upon the way her mother had of making friends too readily, enforcing her opinion in a voice of so much authority and such high-sounding words, with all that solemn slowness and deliberation that imposes so much upon people like Lady Hall, and reducing her at last to an unhappy state of bewildered perplexity, fatal to any ease of manner or self-possession.

Poor Lady Hall! one of those amiable women always more ready to like than to dislike, seeing the best of every one as of everything, and whose nearest approach to a dignified

demeanour was a sort of uncomfortable cross look that melted the moment the slightest friendly overture emanated from the opposition, doubly inclined to be kindly and cordial to a lady who had been so motherly towards Sam and made him change his wet things, and already loving from his description the sweet bright girl who had so fascinated him—was it at all likely that she should be able to be either dignified or distant?

When Madame d'Estanville entered, the very graciousness of her manner made Lady Hall unhappy. Had she been by herself or without Anne she would have forgotten her imperfect French and succeeded in conveying her own kindly feelings to the warmhearted French lady; but Anne was there, bent upon impressing Madame d'Estanville with the fact of their not being ordinary people, and that she especially was superior to most; and Lady Hall, with her pink and white face blushing like any young girl of sixteen, was a miserable specimen of English gaucherie and a complete enigma to Madame d'Estanville. The truth was that to all but Sam Madame d'Estanville's

appearance took them by surprise. Knowing nothing of her previous history, they had simply imagined her to be a lady perhaps of tolerable birth, living upon a small property in a decayed old house. Even Madame Biète's statements had not been realized, and that indefinable air of having held a great position, of having mixed much in the world, the charm of her graceful manner, the delicate beauty of her face, the very graciousness which savoured (against her intention) of condescension, was something they were unprepared for. The deference shown her by Adèle, the reverence that displayed itself in every gesture of Marie d'Estanville, had also its influence; and Sam saw with infinite satisfaction that Anne was for once completely at fault, and that she was quite as much astonished as her mother, though she showed it in a different way.

The more conviction came to her that she was before one very different from her usual experience, the more did Anne resolve upon making it plain that she was different also, and that Madame d'Estanville was not to confound her and her family with those specimens of

English who had hitherto sought Normandy from motives of economy or actual debt. As Madame d'Estanville found the mother so mute she turned to the daughter. It amused her infinitely to notice the air of pretension that accorded so ill with Anne's commonplace appearance; and as she saw the timid glances cast by Lady Hall towards her strongminded daughter, she began to form her own conclusions, and to draw out Anne, greatly to her satisfaction.

“Vous êtes aussi bonne que nous,” was Anne's explanation when Madame d'Estanville asked her how it was that she had prevailed upon her mother to break through her rule of making no acquaintances, uttered with great confidence, in the happiest ignorance of her saying anything but what she meant to say, and of her hostess being a countess in her own right, and quartering the royal arms with her own; and Madame d'Estanville, considerably puzzled, could only try to conceal her smile at so amusing a speech—and look at Adèle.

Finding conversation almost at a standstill, Adèle offered to show the conservatory to

Miss Hall; but Anne refused curtly enough, saying it was too hot: she was not going to leave her mother alone to have her brains picked by this great lady, in whose sarcastic smile Anne fancied she detected anything but the approval or appreciation for herself that she intended her to have.

But Madame d'Estanville, in that easy manner that had swayed much more impracticable people than Anne Hall, rose, and putting her hand on Lady Hall's arm, led the way, leaving Anne to the bitter choice of following them, and thus proving her inconsistency, or of remaining with Adèle, watching her brother's evident and open admiration for Marie.

Anne kept her seat; she piqued herself, amongst other things, upon her consistency; and with a warning cough as her mother passed her, she remained, feeling, for the first time in her life, that she had been ousted by a stronger spirit than her own.

Madame d'Estanville's one mistake during this visit was in not sufficiently realizing Anne's powers. She saw she was shallow and not

really clever, and fell into the great error of not thinking it worth her while to conciliate her.

Afterwards, she used to ask herself bitterly enough—would things have been different had she tried to soften her? Alas! the power for mischief lies often in the weakest hand, and the enemy we despise is often the one who wounds us most deeply.

Madame d'Estanville had but just returned to the drawing-room, when Monsieur de Belleville entered radiant. "Decidedly my star is in the ascendant," he thought, when he found himself presented to the family he had already selected as the one who was to have the distinguished honour of furnishing the future Comtesse de Belleville.

He devoted himself to Anne in a way that amused Marie beyond expression. Unfortunately, Anne looked at her, and caught her making a little gesture of astonishment and amusement to her mother. This little trifle turned the balance against her: Anne left the château with a feeling of dislike towards poor Marie that was destined to bear bitter and

terrible fruit. She was not a person at all safe to offend, especially when the offence was one directed against the strongest feelings in her nature—her own tremendous self-love and self-appreciation.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"ANGLAISES pur sang," was the Count's exclamation as the door closed upon the English party.

"I adore the English," said Marie, defiantly.

"So do I," said Monsieur de Belleville, "especially when they are rich. These people are said to be millionaires. How do you come to know them?"

Madame d'Estanville explained everything to him, and he amused himself by criticising their dress, their manner, and everything else. As he had determined to try and marry the young lady (who looked awfully old and cross), he must carefully conceal his intentions, in case of failure.

They went to dinner, Madame d'Estanville

watching eagerly and anxiously to see what her cousin thought of Mademoiselle d'Estanville.

As if Monsieur de Belleville was going to betray his real feelings: while the family interests were at stake he was the very last person in the world to express an opinion favourable to the young girl, whose future he intended so remorselessly to sacrifice; and poor Madame d'Estanville was bitterly disappointed. Her last hope seemed slipping away from her; she had thought that when Monsieur de Belleville had seen Marie, and noted the excessive loveliness and grace (and no one, she thought, could see it unmoved), that when Marie had won his heart he would see that the suggested sacrifice was impossible.

But Monsieur de Belleville was far too worldlywise, far too rusé to betray the excessive admiration with which he saw the freshness and loveliness of his young cousin. If he did, he felt he would be furnishing the mother with weapons against himself; if he said, "How beautiful Marie is, and how graceful!" the mother would naturally say, "And yet this is the girl you think of bestowing upon Jules Maître."

So he held his peace, and chatted pleasantly and very amusingly, paying unceasing compliments to Madame d'Estanville, who was bored to death by them, and treating Adèle with a condescending politeness that was almost more than she could bear; while to Marie he unbent as a father might do, and before the little dinner was over he had placed every one exactly where he wanted them to be.

Poor Madame d'Estanville, in spite of herself, was carried back to the days when her beauty, her fortune, and her graceful wit had placed her so high amongst the great people of those times. The Count, warmed by his irreproachable dinner and some excellent wine, poured forth anecdote after anecdote; and Marie heard, with the most unmitigated astonishment, of masked balls and scenes in which her mother seemed to have been the central figure; and of pranks which exceeded anything her innocent and unsophisticated nature would ever have dreamt of.

But her mother, drawn out of herself by all these remembrances, began to remind the Count of one thing after another that had laid

dormant in her memory, and entered into it all with a zest that showed how strongly circumstances had been against her to enable her to resign herself without a murmur to her present life.

It did her good to talk over the difference between now and then, and to contrast the brilliancy of long ago with her present unhappiness; for she had nothing to reproach herself with, and a girlhood of the stiffest conventual life made her look upon that time as the one bright, the one sunny spot in her life.

"Parlons d'affaires," said the Count at length, as he found himself sitting alone with Madame d'Estanville. "I should much like to arrange so as to see all this affair *en train* before I leave Ortan-sur-Mer. Your daughter, my dear cousin, looks as if she possesses some share of her mother's great good sense. I suspect that she will not cause us any anxiety."

"You have seen Marie," faltered poor Madame d'Estanville; "do you still think Monsieur Maître a fitting match for her?" She spoke with a certain pique—it galled her to the quick that, having seen her, he should

speaking so calmly of so terrible a sacrifice. "What do you think of Marie?" she asked this abruptly and with an irrepressible impatience in her voice.

"Well," said the Count, "very pretty, very rustic, very unformed, and, I am quite sure, very amiable."

Poor Madame d'Estanville's hopes died. "You cannot expect the finished manners of a great lady from my little girl," she said; "and to tell you the truth, though you may think the grapes sour, I really prefer her perfect simplicity and ignorance of the world to the artificial smile and self-possession of a girl who at seventeen already knows how to conceal all she thinks and feels as if she were forty, and—I never will consent to your proposal!"

Monsieur de Belleville bowed gently, and after a moment's silence he said, "I can feel for you, chère Madame; there are, let me say, many painful positions in life, and many painful moments. One's first grey hair, one's first very well-pronounced wrinkle is a very great shock, and it is a moment of painful emotions; but I would impress upon you first, my dear cousin,

that you did not make the position, so you have no remorse, secondly, that one reconciles oneself after a little time to everything."

"Nothing, no time, years would not reconcile her to such a *mésalliance*," said Madame d'Estanville, passionately.

"Then," said the Count, calmly and coldly, "que faire!"

Alas! where was the use of endeavouring to change this man's opinions?—a man who spoke of the emotions excited by his grey hair and his wrinkles as if the happiness or misery of a young life was to be placed on the same footing?

Putting her hand over her aching and tearless eyes, Madame d'Estanville tried to think, but her brain seemed to be in a whirl. "I will see Monsieur Maître," she said, in a rigid voice. "I said so before. I will be guided afterwards by circumstances."

"Before we quite leave the subject," said the Count, blandly, "are you sure that—supposing you and your daughter (influenced by you) refuse this marriage—she may not some day reproach you for having by your

pride condemned her to poverty and obscurity, when her lot might have been so different? Marie d'Estanville here, and without any chance of seeing the world, and Marie d'Estanville done justice to by our Parisian fournisseurs, rich, free, at the head of a magnificent establishment—what a different life! Will she thank you for throwing these things away, and causing her to disregard them while yet she was ignorant of their value?"

"Despising and hating her husband, admired (for she is beautiful), exposed to all the temptations of a world of which she never would quite realize the evil!" added Madame d'Estanville. "Let us speak of it no more;" and rising, she summoned Marie and Adèle, and in music (during which the Count indulged in short naps, and made very bad shots at the names of things he had not heard) the evening slowly wore away.

"If I were only a few, a very few years younger," said the Count, as he laid his head upon his pillow, "I would propose to her myself, and marry her; she is certainly charming, always supposing," he added, "that I

could afford such an expensive thing as a wife. After all, it is perhaps as well as it is. I suspect if she marries that man, she will lead him a precious life. Given opportunity and power, women are the same all the world over."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE emotion and excitement of the day did not pass over Madame d'Estanville without affecting her. She had put a restraint upon herself, and had borne herself with composure so far, but once alone, when all save Jacqueline were in bed, when the necessity for self-control ceased, then the reaction set in, and was terrible. Fainting-fit succeeded fainting-fit, and when she revived she lay pale, cold, and death-like, her eyes half closed, the tears forcing their way between the lids, without sobs or violence of any kind, and Jacqueline, terribly perplexed and distressed, sat patiently doing all she knew to soothe and relieve her.

Madame d'Estanville forbade her calling assistance of any kind, and the faithful woman

obeyed her, glad in her jealous love for her mistress that Mademoiselle Morier was not to be a witness of so complete a self-abandonment to despair and sorrow.

Before very long the remedies took effect, and Madame d'Estanville, with her heart overflowing, unburdened herself to Jacqueline, and told her all. She could not have chosen a better confidante. Jacqueline, like most old servants, had a perfect antipathy to all who had in the remotest degree offended the family of whom she made part; and her indignation and astonishment at the audacity of this Monsieur Maître daring to aspire to the hand of Mademoiselle d'Estanville was only equalled by her wrath against the Comte de Belleville. Hard-hearted, selfish old monster! If he was really rich, why could he not put things straight? and to think that for this man she had exerted herself as though he had been a prince of the blood royal!

But Jacqueline did not, like her mistress, see nothing but despair before her; she had the firmest possible conviction that it only required a good head and cleverness to outwit

any one whom she despised as heartily as she did Monsieur Maître; and she made up her mind that somehow, by hook or crook, she would defeat him.

No roturier should either possess the old Château d'Estanville or the hand of her young mistress. And Jacqueline, who always had that great element of success, implicit belief in herself, so cheered and encouraged Madame d'Estanville, that at last the weary eyes closed, and sleep came to her.

Jacqueline sat beside her, resolving her plans, and every now and then uttering fervent prayers, till the broad daylight streaming through the chinks of the door caused her to remember her household work, and gently moving away, she went off to call her helpmate to see that the cows were well milked, with a step as alert and as bright a look in her eyes as though she had slept her usual time: and Madame d'Estanville slept on till an unusually late hour, and awoke with that strange, bewildered remembrance of some coming grief which all of us have probably known at some period of our lives. No word

passed between her and Jacqueline about the confidential talk that had taken place between them, but in all the assistance Jacqueline gave there was an increase of reverence, a certain tenderness that her unfortunate mistress appreciated, and that soothed and comforted her.

One thing Madame d'Estanville arranged : she was determined that she would prevent the possibility of Marie's meeting Monsieur Maître, who was by Monsieur de Belleville's instructions to be at the château at three ; so she allowed Marie to accompany Jacqueline to Ortan-sur-Mer, to her daughter's inexpressible delight and satisfaction ; and while Jacqueline did her marketing, Mademoiselle d'Estanville was to go and see Lady Hall, and the one friend they had who lived in the place, Madame Biète.

As Madame d'Estanville stood giving her last instructions to Jacqueline, the contrast between her expression and that of her daughter was wonderful. Marie in brilliant spirits, her dark eyes dancing with delight, was seated in the little carriage, waiting with repressed impatience for last words to be over, and

Madame d'Estanville, pale, grave, an expression of sadness and melancholy that made Jacqueline's heart ache, stood leaning her white hands over the little railing that divided the small garden from the park, looking—thought Jacqueline to herself—more like a saint in an old picture than anything else.

At her urgent request Monsieur de Belleville arrived a little before three. Madame d'Estanville wished him to be present, promising him that there should be no scene, nothing but calmness and moderation. He arrived, bringing with him Monsieur Maître; and Madame d'Estanville saw the dreaded enemy of her house standing before her with a surprise she could hardly conceal.

She had imagined a man, young, careless, and full of that disagreeable consciousness of riches that oppresses others so painfully when they are poor, and that is so often found when the wealth has not been won by a long and steady struggle, by talent or by patience, but has come so unexpectedly as to "turn the head." She had imagined a man vulgar, and full of presumption. She had expected, in

short, to find Monsieur Maître very much what he really was, and to see his manner and his dress betray his vulgarity.

But a very different man stood before her, a man tutored by Monsieur de Belleville into appearing exactly what he was not. Shrewd enough to perceive the value of Monsieur de Belleville's hints, Monsieur Maître had discarded his ornaments, his smart clothes, and his jaunty manner. Nothing could be quieter than his dress, nothing more utterly without pretension than his manner; and Madame d'Estanville, judging by what she saw, could not but feel she had done the man injustice.

Monsieur de Belleville introduced him, and began the conversation by attributing so many noble sentiments to the young man whose cause he had adopted, that Monsieur Maître felt a glow of satisfaction at the picture of himself he heard so eloquently and forcibly drawn; and Monsieur de Belleville (who never did things by halves) said so much of his feelings of honour and delicacy towards a family once standing in the position of master to his father, that Monsieur Maître began to

think that he in reality possessed those feelings, and to attribute to himself noble characteristics, hitherto dormant and unknown.

Madame d'Estanville looked earnestly at him: there was something in his countenance she did not like—but of course she was prejudiced. "Monsieur," she said, in her clear refined tones, "it is with inexpressible pain that I see you to-day. You must be aware that your name recalls things exquisitely painful to me. I conceive no good can come of this interview; I consented because my good cousin having undertaken a long journey and some trouble to serve me, I felt it would be unfair to deny his request. In the first place, I do not believe that my late husband owed this money. There is some mistake."

"Madame," said Monsieur Maître, "really" —He was interrupted by Monsieur de Belleville.

"We have gone into all that, my dear Madame," he said; "I told you that my lawyers had investigated the whole affair."

"But I do not believe in lawyers, or trust them either," said Madame d'Estanville; "a

lawyer simply looks at a thing to find out how many letters he can write about it, at so much a letter ; he first writes something so obscurely worded, that you cannot possibly understand it : you ask for an explanation, he answers, giving you the option of various solutions, one more puzzling than another, everything leading to something still more complicated, till at length you take the original matter into your own consideration in despair, and find that being a woman, you could have put the case into five lines, and that you have simply spent your money, and been mystified unnecessarily. Lawyers, I repeat, I never believe a word they say ; their métier is to tell as many stories as they possibly can, so that unless I see the whole thing myself in black and white——”

“Madame,” said the Count, with repressed impatience, “you entrusted your cause to me, and asked me to tender you my advice. I understood from you that you would be contented if my man of business satisfied himself and me that the claim existed. Now you consent to receive Monsieur Maître, and indulge in a long tirade against lawyers. Very womanly,

but, allow me to remark, not very business-like. Will you not be content without a public trial? do you wish this claim made public?"

Madame d'Estanville changed colour; after all, her poor bewildered head was not able to cope with this business; alone she felt helpless, and she owned to herself she was unreasonable and ungrateful. A public trial! Heaven forbid! To have her husband's misdeeds and misdemeanours dragged into light, the privacy of her domestic life intruded upon, and bared to the gaze of the idle, to the frequenters of clubs and cafés, and to become the theme of newspaper reports! No; she had not courage for this.

"Madame," again said Monsieur de Belleville, "any papers you wish to see on this subject, any authority you wish consulted, Monsieur Maître and I will assist you in seeing. Monsieur Maître's only wish is to be open and honourable, and to put an end to the painful state of things now existing."

The Count paused for a moment with an admiration for his eloquence that covered him with complacency. "Have I your permission," he said, "to place before you the plan that

Monsieur Maître suggests, as a felicitous mode of putting an end to all future annoyances?"

Madame d'Estanville bowed haughtily, coldly, feeling as though she were going to receive an insult, bracing herself to hear it calmly, as she had promised. "That man's father had not dared to sit down before us," she thought bitterly, as she saw Monsieur Maître, with an assumption of ease he was far from feeling, lean back in his chair; "and he is now not only sitting, but dictating terms to me and mine."

"Monsieur Maître," began the Count, blandly, "is a young man of excellent sense. He is well off, and finds himself in all respects, *save one*, in possession of the things that constitute happiness. But he is unfortunately placed, by Providence, by his birth——well," said the Count, with a little embarrassment, "he wants, in short, connection, and the only way to obtain that is by marriage."

Madame d'Estanville bowed: she could not trust herself to speak.

"Several young ladies of good family have been proposed to him," said the Count, who thought this slight invention quite excusable,

“but my young friend had one ambition : he wished to marry into a Norman family : he wanted a wife without any dowry, save that of family, and, in short, goodness ; and, my dear Madame, he heard from all sides the character of your daughter, and how full she was of every virtue ; and he thought, when his lawyers urged upon him the enforcement of this claim, that it might be the means, perhaps, of inducing you to overlook his want of connection, and enable you to favour his suit.”

There was a dead silence : Madame d'Estauville, her hands firmly pressed together, turned to Monsieur Maître, her face set in its rigidity.

“I never will consent to sell my child,” she said, with an effort, “never ; this is impossible.”

Monsieur de Belleville bit his lip.

Monsieur Maître rose and stood before her, his anxiety for success helping him to take the tone best calculated to secure it.

“Hear me one moment, Madame,” he said, in a voice and with an attitude of the deepest humility. “Do you think at my age, with all my life before me, I should wish to be married

to a wife who looked upon me with hatred, instead of affection? All I ask is the opportunity of trying to secure a place in Mademoiselle d'Estanville's affections, and in your esteem. If I do not possess the art of pleasing her, then," said Monsieur Maître, "it will be less bitter to know that she rejects me from no motives but those of natural indifference, than to find myself spurned from your presence as unworthy of even a hearing."

His words sounded fair, but there was a false ring in his voice that Madame d'Estanville detected. Her reply was as cold as her manner. "Your proposal," she said, "sounds very well." She paused, she could not make an enemy of this man. She little knew that nothing could have mortified him more, nothing could have wounded his self-love and his vanity so much as the visible repugnance that showed itself in every gesture, and the paleness and restraint which entirely told their own tale.

"It seems to me," said Monsieur de Belleville, pleasantly, "that the permission to woo the young lady can be granted without any

reluctance even by you, chère Madame. Shall we consider it a settled thing?"

Another silence, during which Madame d'Estanville's heart beat fast; her strength was beginning to give way. "Nothing would induce me to receive Monsieur," she said, with a gesture towards Monsieur Maître, "on an intimate footing, knowing nothing whatever of either his character or his disposition. This has nothing to do with my private feelings about your family, Monsieur Maître," she added, turning to him suddenly; "were you the noblest born in all France I should say the same thing. You must show me a little what your life at home is—you must let me consider you simply as a neighbour, then——"

"Monsieur Maître asks nothing more," said the Count, interposing quickly. "Ah! my dear cousin, Monsieur Maître is overwhelmed with gratitude. Receive him as your neighbour, and leave the rest to Providence. Where is Marie?"

"Gone to see a friend," answered Madame d'Estanville, faintly, as she bowed to Monsieur Maître in token of wishing him farewell,—and

there was nothing left for him to do but to accept his dismissal.

“I must accompany you so far,” said the Count, rising with alacrity ; he had no wish to find himself tête-à-tête with Madame d'Estanville. “I have taken rooms at the hotel,” he said, as he wished her good-bye, “and intend to remain there till things are *en train*.” Before she could answer him he was gone.

CHAPTER XXV.

MONSIEUR DE BELLEVILLE had no more intention of having a tête-à-tête with Monsieur Maître than he had of being alone with Madame d'Estanville, and when they left the château he became so silent that Monsieur Maître, albeit a man obtuse enough in some things, saw that his companion did not intend allowing any private conversation to take place between them. They parted close to the concierge's lodge in the park, a short cut taking Monsieur Maître up to d'Occtrung, the grounds of which adjoined those of Madame d'Estanville. It might be imagined that Monsieur de Belleville's head would have been full of the painful scene he had just passed through; but the man of pleasure had the happy

faculty of being able to throw aside feelings of any kind that involved painful reflections, that is to say, so long as they did not interfere actively with his own immediate and personal comfort.

Madame d'Estanville, grateful to him for coming so speedily to her assistance, and wondering a little that a man so selfish in all his movements could without any particular motive submit to trouble and discomfort with so much apparent philosophy, would have been a little surprised had she known how many things assisted in causing the effect that so astonished her ; for Monsieur de Belleville had tried to arrange a marriage for himself and had failed. The failure did not cause a bitter disappointment, as the proposed alliance was simply one *de convenance*, and not even Jean knew anything about it ; but Monsieur de Belleville, one of those sanguine people who have implicit faith in their success, was annoyed, especially as he was in want of money at that moment, and had offered to give his coronet and connection in exchange for a most plebeian fortune. He won a considerable sum at cards,

which was a slight consolation, and being far from inclined to "fritter it away in paying his debts," he fancied this journey to the seaside would answer in every way. He had money enough to go there comfortably, and he thought the change would do him good. He would have great credit for obeying the instincts of family pride, and might derive some advantage from it; and, indeed, this belief in things always turning out in his favour was one of his cherished ideas, and one which he could say, with truth, had been verified more than once.

As he drove along towards Ortan-sur-Mer he was thinking of the information he had picked up about Miss Anne Hall. She must be enormously rich by all accounts; she never expected to get things for less than was first named; she gave extravagant prices for all that she bought; she evidently ruled the house; and if she had had no fortune was it likely she would be allowed to hold the tone she did towards Miladi her mother? The Count had seen her, true, only for a moment; she had a hard face and was not prepossessing, but then

she was horribly ill-dressed : and supposing her very disagreeable it did not much signify—"We could go our own ways," thought Monsieur de Belleville ; "and after all, with my fixed habits, any wife must yield to them a little. Mademoiselle Anne Hall, really she is 'pas mal.'" So the Count resolved on going to call, inventing a message from Madame d'Estanville to cover his appearance ; and he thought his good genius was in the ascendant when he found the ladies "at home," surrounded with so many occupations that the Count, accustomed to deduct conclusions from trifles, saw that there was not the slightest intention of going out just then. He had evidently arrived at an opportune moment.

This was true in more senses than one. Lady Hall had that morning suffered severely from headache ; and if Anne had been any one but herself she would have been overwhelmed with that feeling that comes to weakminded people, when they have shown temper and behaved as badly as possible—she would have been horribly ashamed of herself. But Anne,

being a superior person, could never naturally be ashamed of anything she did. She was never in the wrong; her violence she never realized in the least, the utter want of self-control that caused her to get into a state of excitement pitiable to behold was the result of some particular state of nerves; a theory ingeniously adapted to cover all that neutralized the better parts of her character and left her in that position of superiority she assumed.

But considering that Lady Hall had been tried to the utmost the day before by "dear Anne," whose great sense had taken the direction of violent abuse of the château and its inmates, that she had fairly quarrelled with Sam, called Marie a "pert-looking thing," that Lady Hall's headache was so real as to oblige her to stay in her own room all the morning, it is not wonderful that Anne, superior as she was, felt uncomfortable. She dearly loved her mother, though she would only allow her to be happy in her own particular way; and had she only had a little less stubbornness would have gone and kissed her and

melted poor Lady Hall by owning herself in the wrong.

It was a great relief to hear Monsieur de Belleville announced, even though his being admitted was a mistake ; and Anne found herself, quite against her will, talking pleasantly, as she best knew how, to the one member of the family of the d'Estanvilles who had shown appreciation for her superiority. The Count laid the foundation of future visits, and promised to bring one hundred and one things which he imagined Lady Hall could not possibly do without ; and Anne, charmed out of her bad humour, made her mother happy for the afternoon with a new book, and then went out for a solitary stretch upon the sands.

But the Count was not equally charmed. "This English young lady is hard and cold and of a cross nature," he said to himself. "Give me the mamma with the apple cheeks : if I guess right and Mademoiselle's income is £1000 a year, she would spend £999 19s. as she chose, and we should quarrel about the shilling over. What sacrifices we of the nobility are called upon to make !"

Nevertheless he repeated his visits and remained at Ortan-sur-Mer, somewhat consoled by the excellence of the poultry, which he was particularly fond of, and which Jacqueline, anxious to propitiate him, sent constantly to his landlady for his use.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE days went on, bringing no decision or advancement in the plans laid by Monsieur de Belleville.

Monsieur Maître called every day, and to Marie's inexpressible astonishment Madame d'Estanville invariably received him — why Marie could not make out, unless it was to talk to Adèle, who alone seemed to have patience with him. She herself was civil, but distant, and thought him a great bore; and her mother was so grave, so cold, that a most uncomfortable visit usually took place.

At first Monsieur Maître seemed to feel this coldness and restraint a great deal; but by degrees he began to get accustomed to it, and once at his ease the vulgarity of the man shone

out beyond the power of Monsieur de Belleville to repress.

The only thing that reconciled Madame d'Estanville to his presence was the perfect excuse it afforded her, so far as Mr. Hall's visits were concerned; for he, too, found his way now to the château daily, at first with ingenious excuses, and then with no excuses at all—finding a welcome in Madame d'Estanville's face, a still dearer one in Marie's eyes.

Monsieur de Pendarves, daily growing more grey and older-looking, formed another member of what became a very pleasant little society; and often Madame Biète would join them; and in spite of her deadly anxiety it was not in Madame d'Estanville's nature not to enjoy the pleasant evenings, when Jacqueline's coffee would be served on the steps near the conservatory, and she would listen to the pleasant talk going on between Madame Biète and MM. de Belleville and Pendarves; when Marie, with Mr. Hall, sitting low at her mother's feet, would keep up that murmured conversation broken in upon by those sudden long pauses and utter silence on each side

that are in reality so eloquent; and Adèle would be warmly thanked by mother and daughter for having been so good and so kind about Monsieur Maître, and for having talked to him all the evening.

Marie, indeed, was daily growing more devoted to "Monsieur Hall," as she always called him, but nothing had as yet brought her a knowledge of her feelings; she only knew that the days were very dull on which he was not there, and that lately she had thought life a much pleasanter thing than she had thought it a little while back.

Adèle Morier in the meanwhile was suffering from the bitterest, the most jealous and angry feelings.

"Why is every one to be happy but myself?" she would exclaim, passionately, as she paced up and down her room after every one had gone to rest. "Why is Marie to be the object of adoration to three men, not one of whom takes the slightest notice of me? Is it because of her great black eyes and incessant laugh? I should laugh, too, if I had had her life. Even Monsieur Maître, who is actually afraid of

her, wishes to marry her. Is my life to be all like this? am I always to be subject to the will of others, always dependent? I hate that girl with her prosperity and her laughter; I hate her, I hate every one, I think, every one but Monsieur de Pendarves, and he, too, has no eyes for any one but Mademoiselle d'Estanville; and I had hoped to marry Monsieur Maître. I should have hated him, but I should have had wealth; I could have done as I liked. I am sick of being here—sick of being always repressed, quiet, and watchful—sick of that stupid little lady with her rococo airs and graces." So Adèle was not happy, and Marie's feelings of dislike were more justifiable than Madame d'Estanville knew.

But Monsieur Maître, though he talked to Adèle, was not unmindful of his own interests, and he did not at all like the position of things. He was no further on now than he had been three weeks ago; and after due consideration he went to Monsieur de Belleville, and that gentleman, who was getting tired of Ortan-sur-Mer, came to the rescue.

Monsieur de Belleville saw that if his plan

was to succeed at all it must be through Marie herself.

Madame d'Estanville was not one bit more reconciled to the idea of Monsieur Maître's becoming her son-in-law than she had been ; she was patient because of Mr. Hall, but about Monsieur Maître, there was not a mistake he made in speaking, not an absurdity that could be taken hold of, that the keen-witted little lady allowed to pass ; so Monsieur de Belleville took occasion, the first time he could speak to Marie alone, to say to her, in a tone of seriousness very different from the one he ordinarily employed, " You must come with me into the park : I have something to say to you of the utmost importance, and you must hear it by yourself." And Marie, half frightened and half amazed, stepped out into the park across the grass, leaving behind her for ever the childish happiness and joyousness of her youth.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MONSIEUR DE BELLEVILLE was a hardened man of the world, and had a very faint belief as to the reality of any one's sentiments and feelings; but though he had all his life seen the worst side of human nature, in particular the worst side of womanly human nature, there is something in real freshness, real purity, and real truth that carries conviction to the veriest infidel that ever breathed; and though he thought without a pang of the fate he wished to give Marie, even he felt something like remorse as he looked into the beautiful and child-like eyes, raised half-frightened, half shyly towards his own countenance.

He was going to open up something of the past—he was going to show her her duty, and

prove to her the necessity that existed for delivering her mother from a miserable dilemma, in which her love for her child was overpowering her common sense. The child, hitherto in utter and happy ignorance of shadows, looking brightly around and before her, was now to have her soul darkened with the knowledge of evil. She was to be told that her father, whose memory she had been taught to cherish, had gambled and spent, and that his improvidence and recklessness, his selfishness and dissipation, had not only ruined them, deprived her of advantages hers by right of birth and position, but that she was now to sacrifice any feelings she might have entertained as to freedom of choice, &c., and marry a man she had been taught to dislike, in order to rescue her mother and herself from actual want. Though in his grave, the misdeeds of her father were to affect her still.

When they were out of sight of the house, the Count put his hand upon her shoulder, and looking at her with a kind and paternal expression, he said, "You love your mother, little one, I know, and I am going to speak to

you, not as though you were a child, but as to a woman, the daughter of a noble race—your mother's child in all things."

Marie's colour rose as she listened: she looked surprised and alarmed.

"Have you ever thought of your future, my child?" continued the Count, in the same kind tone. "Have you ever dreamed, as most girls dream, of the sort of life you would like to lead by-and-by?"

"Very often indeed," answered Marie, frankly, though her eyes fell a little under the keen inspection of those of the Count.

"Will you give me your confidence?" asked the Count, kindly. "I should like to hear what your ideas on the subject are, and you know I am your nearest relation, and have nothing but the kindest feelings towards you and yours."

"I have thought of myself living on here with that dear little mother, and somehow making——" she stopped. She felt that she could not confide these dreams to him; something in his face made her stop short.

He finished her sentence quietly. "A

fortune," he said, in a satirical tone. "How? by music? Have you a great talent for that? or painting, or, in short, in what direction does your genius lie?"

Marie's eyes filled with tears; she was too proud to allow them to fall, and it was a moment before she replied: "I have no genius—no talents," she said at length, in a low voice.

"You would be singularly unlike your family if you had *either*," replied the Count, quietly. "We are handsome, as a rule, and brilliant; gifted, like your mother, with great conversational powers, but genius—talent, I never heard of any great cleverness in our family, and I do not see that it was wanted. And your father; yes, by the way, he had one talent—he spent more money in a short time than any one I ever knew."

Marie's eyes flashed. "He was my father," she said, indignantly, "and in those days we were rich."

"And he made you poor," said the Count. "Now, my dear child, listen to me: I have a great deal to say to you, and if you begin by going into a violent state of excitement, we

shall never get to the end ; and really," he continued, pathetically, "if you had the least idea how I hate a scene you would try and control yourself."

Marie said nothing ; but her companion took for granted that she would spare him, and he began in a voice neither satirical nor unkind, but very earnest.

"You have, perhaps, in the midst of your dreams thought of marrying—of leaving home. Ah ! my child, I too have been young, and can understand ; but you little thought, when you were dreaming vaguely of that future, that a few days would perhaps realize what you in your imagination postponed for years."

Marie's eyes were once more raised, and fixed upon his face. She could not understand what he was saying.

"If your mother was in a position of difficulty," said Monsieur de Belleville, after a moment's pause—"if by sacrificing vague dreams, and doing what I advised you to do, you could save her, rescue her from future sorrow and great anxiety—would you do it?"

"How can you ask it?" exclaimed Marie,

her eyes glistening and her head raised; "I would do anything for my dear mother."

"Good!" said the Count, as he again stopped and mused for a moment. "I would willingly spare you, my child, very painful explanations. I hope you will be so wise as to ask me no questions, though I may somewhat surprise you. You have seen lately Monsieur Maître. What do you think of him?"

"He is simply vulgar, forward, and detestable," said Marie, promptly with a contemptuous shrug of her shoulders that none but French shoulders could have rendered so expressive.

"Encouraging, certainly," said the Count, half aloud and half to himself. "May I ask, my very clear-sighted cousin, how it is that in the space of a short time, and without so much as half a dozen words passing between you, you have arrived at so very unfavourable a judgment?"

"Any one can read in Monsieur Maître's face that he is self-sufficient and proud of being rich," said Marie, composedly; "any one can see that his wealth has come to him too late; he is ill at ease, trying to look self-possessed. It

is seen as easily as possible, and as clearly as your dignified and quiet manner tells its own tale. He is a parvenu ; you not only a gentleman, but the most perfect gentleman possible."

Monsieur de Belleville felt flattered beyond description ; for Marie was so sincere that he received this unconscious compliment without the usual drawback of knowing it to be said and not meant.

"I am sorry, my charming little cousin, you do not like Monsieur Maître's manner," he said, "though I am not insensible to the compliment you pay me. It is Monsieur Maître who wishes to marry you, and I advise you to receive his suit kindly—*I advise it*," said the Count, firmly and with emphasis.

Marie turned pale. "You are joking, Monsieur le Comte," she said, with a startled and troubled look. "You wish to try me."

"I am in earnest," said the Count. "It is the only way of rescuing your mother from a position of extreme difficulty."

"My mother would rather die than that I should marry that man," exclaimed Marie, her eyes flashing with indignation.

“Your mother would rather do anything than force you to marry any one you hated,” said the Count, quietly; “but you must not only marry him, but conceal from her any slight repugnance you may have conceived or imagined against Monsieur Maître. You have seen no one else you prefer, so that it is simply giving up girlish fancies, and you yourself will be the first to acknowledge how right I was to save you from the future your mother prefers for you.”

“But why should I take this step,” exclaimed Marie, passionately, “blindly, and without knowing why; on the faith of your assurances, and without one word of counsel from my mother, who alone up till now has been my guide?”

“I ask you honestly if your mother is a person likely to accept a sacrifice from the hands of her child? all her own prejudices—strong enough as you know, Marie—being against this man—not from personal knowledge, but from traditional and hereditary feelings, founded upon vague and imaginary wrongs towards your family? No, Marie”—and the

Count's tone was still more firm—"you must do this of your own free will, and I trust without forcing me to give you any further reasons than the one I have given you."

"You have given me none," exclaimed Marie, vehemently, "and I tell you frankly that I will not sacrifice my whole life without knowing everything."

"This is your final decision?" asked the Count; "remember what I have to tell you will grieve you terribly."

"You ask me to sacrifice all my life," was Marie's answer. "I may grieve, but I shall not be acting without knowledge; I shall judge for myself."

"Be it so," said the Count; "and remember it is only by your own wish that I open up the history of your mother's impoverished fortunes, of the cause of your seclusion here, when by rights you ought to have the advantages all girls of your age enjoy in the position Nature placed you."

Monsieur de Belleville then told her everything without exaggeration; how Monsieur d'Estanville had gambled and lost everything,

and finally, when he had died, how her mother had sacrificed all but the smallest pittance of her own fortune to pay his debts. "After years of self-denial," he added, "this pittance and her own old home is threatened by this sudden claim made upon her, and after careful investigation, made by my lawyers, the claim is proved to be just. If enforced (as it will be), what follows? You are turned out of this house, and left absolutely penniless—beggars, without one farthing to support you—entirely dependent on the charity of relations your mother has already offended." The Count stopped for a few moments, and then went on—"Monsieur Maître may be wanting in ease of manner, &c., but he is known to be a very generous and open-handed man, and I think that his proposal proves it. 'Let us unite our fortunes and cancel the debt ;'—this is his wish. Leave your mother to live on here in her own old home, while you, with all the comforts and luxuries of a rich man's wife, can add much to her necessities and contribute enormously to her happiness. Compare the sacrifice (?) you call my request to hers !"

He ceased. Marie had exercised all the self-control she was capable of, and had been listening with a face growing pale, even to her lips. This, then, was her mother's history. No wonder Jacqueline spared her all the minute worries entailed by their limited means; no wonder her mother had wept when she had seen her arrayed in a dress recalling the difference of then and now. For herself, she had dreamed of heroism, and conceived herself capable of emulating the heroic deeds of her ancestors; should she shrink from a sacrifice she had it in her power to make? and yet she felt how much easier it would be to brave the dangers of a camp, to defend the walls of a besieged city, to do anything involving personal exertion, or braving actual danger, than to marry a man she despised—to live a long life perhaps without a particle of love—to crush down for ever in her heart the passionate affection she was capable of, and live for ever on her guard—for would not all the sentiments which up till now had been instilled into her be as an insult to those which must naturally be those of a man like Monsieur Maître?

Rapidly all this passed through her mind, and she felt that she must be alone, that she must weigh it all—think it all over quite alone. Turning to Monsieur de Belleville, she said, with a gesture full of quiet dignity, but with a face as white as it could be, “Monsieur le Comte, I must be alone; I must think over all this. It has been a terrible revelation to me. I will let you know by to-morrow what I will do.”

“One word,” said the Count. “You will not think it right to consult your mother. If you do so, I may as well go straight back to Paris at once.”

“I promise you not to mention the subject to my mother without your leave,” answered Marie, in a voice so cold, so hard!—changed in that hour, as she herself was changed from the bright, genial, thoughtless girl to one oppressed with the shadow cast from her father’s grave over her future life.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MARIE D'ESTANVILLE regained her own room without meeting any one : thankfully she found herself there, to face the first real, the first great trouble she had known. She felt surprised to see how exactly everything looked as she had left it ; she almost wondered that the flowers still looked so fresh, that her birds sang so merrily, while she in one short hour saw life so differently. Was it possible that only a very little while ago she had been writing comical verses about Monsieur Maître's appearance, destined to be shown, in strictest confidence, to Monsieur de Pendarves, and illustrated by funny figures of herself, Monsieur le Comte (chest a prominent characteristic,) and her mother surveying Monsieur Maître as some quaint and

original curiosity?—and this man had actually got them in his power, he had but to press his claim, and they were houseless, homeless, penniless.

It was a terrible time for that poor child, up till now shielded so effectually from all the darker sides of life; what had she to do with these dreadful things, debts, gambling, and dishonour?

Dishonour! how proud she had been of her race! and now her father's acts had ruined her, and but for her mother his name would have fallen low. Then a revulsion of feeling came; after all, why was she to accept all this as truth, on the authority of one man, against all the convictions of her life? She would ask. Who would she ask? Monsieur de Pendarves; he would tell her, he would tell her the truth, and on his statement she could rely. Giving herself no more time for reflection, she went to Jacqueline at once, and began by asking her if she was very busy.

"Busy? Mademoiselle asks if I am busy; of course, naturally, I am always busy; there is the dinner to see to, and Madame to look

after, the cows have to be milked, and the girl never milks them dry unless she is looked after; then one of the hens is a clumsy mother, and in hatching her chickens will probably manage to smother half; and Antoine is raving about about something, I don't know what: altogether I am almost dead with fatigue——" and Jacqueline stopped short.

Hitherto she had spoken bustling about, and thinking Marie's request was simply another case of reading something to her; now she looked at her, and her voice and countenance changed directly. "You are ill," she said, in alarm; "my child is ill; what is it? tell Jacqueline; has something vexed you?"

"Jacqueline, my poor Jacqueline," said Marie, "I am in great trouble and perplexity, and I want you to help me; I cannot, I must not tell my mother. I want to see Monsieur de Pendarves; could you not manage to go with me? Adèle, Mademoiselle Morier, would perhaps see about some of your business."

"You want to see Monsieur de Pendarves," said Jacqueline, slowly; "what a wonderful,

what a very extraordinary thing. So do I, Mademoiselle; I am most anxious to see him for an affair of real importance. No, Mademoiselle Morier can be of no use, except, perhaps, to stay with Madame. What can a Parisienne know about cows or chickens? Antoine is a stupid old fellow, but to do him justice, he can manage chickens; Mademoiselle is right, she must not worry Madame; I will go and arrange about it." She took off her big apron, and disappeared.

In a few moments she came back, and with Marie set forth across the fields to Monsieur de Pendarves' house.

Jacqueline was much puzzled by Marie's manner, she was so unlike herself. "She must have heard something, or guessed something," thought she, as she walked by Marie's side, entertaining her all the time by an account of a fierce encounter she had had with a cook in the market, who wanted to get all her butter for nothing. "Three times she went away altogether: she hoped to find some as good and cheap elsewhere, but I knew better, and in a violent rage back she came and bought it,

swearing loudly that she would never come to market again, that we were in league, &c. She will, in future, be my best customer," said Jacqueline, quietly. "Our butter is made close, smells of almonds, and tastes of nuts, and that woman knows good butter when it is put before her."

Monsieur de Pendarves was in his garden, doing nothing much more romantic than smoking his pipe and reading his daily paper. He rose in some astonishment to receive his visitors, and with his usual kind manner made Marie feel that she had a sincere and dear friend in him: not for worlds would he have risked this by putting himself in another position towards her.

Jacqueline went off to see Babbette, whom she did not on the whole approve of, and who yet was her greatest confidante on the subject of household management, and the iniquities, in general, of young girls.

"Monsieur de Pendarves," began Marie, suddenly turning upon him her pale face, "you knew my father; was he a bad man?"

Monsieur de Pendarves looked at her in utter

and bewildered astonishment, before he could speak. She went on vehemently—

“Was he a gambler and a spendthrift, leaving debts my mother has beggared herself to pay—was he all this, Monsieur de Pendarves?”

“Why are you asking me all this, child?” exclaimed Monsieur de Pendarves, in horrible perplexity.

“That is no answer,” answered Marie; “tell me, for to you alone can I come for an answer to my question; and on your answer,” she added, in a lower tone, “hangs my future life.”

Monsieur de Pendarves looked at her earnestly. He knew Madame d'Estanville so well that he knew she had told Marie nothing; how had she heard it? how had she found out the trouble they were in?

“Child,” he said, at length, “before attempting to judge your father, you must know the times he lived in. In those days things passed that now would be justly condemned. In those days no man holding the rank your father did could very easily escape playing, and playing high, and if your father played, he did as did others.”

"But all did not lose their whole fortune, and leave to their widows and children a heritage of debt," said Marie, shortly.

Monsieur de Pendarves looked at her again. "If I were to malign your father, how indignant you would be," he said, reproachfully. "You are changed, Marie; who has been filling your ears with tales better forgotten?"

"Circumstances have arisen," said Marie, "and I only want to know the truth. I knew I should hear the truth from you. Before I shape my own future mode of action I must know it. Is it true that my father spent his own and my mother's fortune, and that she has given up all to clear his name?"

"Your mother has acted nobly, and your father—well," said Monsieur de Pendarves (who was really vexed Marie's ideas should be disturbed on a subject, he thought, of no real importance to her now); "he was one of those men who never realized what he was spending. Liberal, generous, and open-handed, he gave right and left, often to undeserving persons, and he certainly left debts he very likely had no idea he possessed. This, I am afraid, is true."

"It is enough," said Marie, and she sat quiet for a few moments; "ah! how sweet it is here," she said, "and how calm, and how I should like to live here!"

She said this so innocently, so unconsciously, that she gave a greater pang than she could have believed to Monsieur de Pendarves.

"I shall be obliged to leave it to you in my will," he said, in a half-laughing voice.

"Then you would not be here, and it would be very dull," said Marie, as she rose. "Good-bye, Monsieur de Pendarves," and she laid her hand on his.

"Marie," he said, "you have some great trouble, why not be frank with me? You know," he said, "how really, how sincerely, I would be your friend. May I not help you?"

Just sufficient consciousness of his liking her enough to wish to save her from Monsieur Maître kept poor Marie silent. She looked at him for a moment, and then her eyes fell. "You cannot help me," she said; "you will soon know all."

"And your mother, of course she will know it," he said, quickly; and Marie's expression

answered him. Once more she bid him good-bye, and then went out of the little garden gate, and stood waiting for Jacqueline, and looking wistfully at the old house and the trim garden, gay with flowers.

The look in her face haunted him to his dying day. He required all his self-command not to rush into the story of his love—to ask her to accept the peace and quiet he could give in lieu of a feverish passion such as she might eventually have for some one else ; but the strong feeling of fear that she would no longer turn to him for advice or confide in him kept him back.

And Marie went home, and excusing herself by the truthful announcement of a violent headache, went to bed.

Long after Madame d'Estanville had left her, Marie lay cold, miserable, and feeling as though death alone could release her from her misery. The more she thought over it all, the more hopeless it seemed. Could he but know it, Marie felt Sam Hall would save her ; but how could she tell him ? He had said nothing on which she could count, and she

could not ask him to save her without knowing more than she knew now of his feelings. Like a newly-caged bird, her poor pinions flapped in vain; and at last, wearied, tearless, utterly exhausted, her judgment obscured by physical prostration, she thought her only line of conduct was to follow Monsieur de Belleville's advice; and she resolved to sacrifice herself, and to marry Monsieur Maître. Then she fell asleep, a prayer upon her lips and in her heart; hushed in the quietness of a false peace.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MONSIEUR DE BELLEVILLE, when he called next day, did so early. He was inexpressibly anxious for Marie's answer. It did not suit his ideas that his relations should be thrown upon the world, as they would be if Marie took her fate into her own hands, and did not follow his advice. But when she came to meet him, and he recognized the change that had come over her—when he saw the pale face and the troubled look in her beautiful eyes, even he had a slight feeling of remorse. He had not till then realized that he was enforcing a sacrifice. So many girls he knew had married without caring a bit for the husband who gave them his name, his riches, and left them to go

their own way, as he went his, that he had not at all understood that, to a fresh unsophisticated girl like Marie d'Estanville, who had too fine a nature ever to become really worldly or to place a false value on things, no wealth in the world could in reality fill up the void in her life such a marriage would create.

She came towards him, and said in a low voice, "I will follow your advice. I will marry that man—on one condition. For the present, at least, let me be spared all lover-like speeches. If he presumes on my consent, I consider myself free. You will see to this, Monsieur le Comte, and make him understand it."

"You are a good girl, and very wise," said the Count, perfectly happy and relieved; "one day you will thank me for this. One day you yourself will wonder why you felt so sorrowful when I proposed this to you. You will be very happy."

"Never," said Marie. "I am going to marry a man I despise." And she added, after a pause, "I should have liked to have been able to love my husband."

Something in her face checked the answer

on Monsieur de Belleville's lips, and they went into the house.

That afternoon Monsieur Maître sent his formal proposals to Marie through the Comte de Belleville, and the letter, submitted to the corrections of his envoy, was a very creditable one.

He said that, aware of Madame d'Estanville's rooted prejudice against him, he addressed this to herself, and after professing the greatest admiration for her, and dwelling upon his own great inferiority in all respects, he trusted his life would disprove all Madame d'Estanville's reasons for distrusting him, &c. Monsieur de Belleville gave Marie this letter before her mother. One moment she grew deadly white, then recovering herself, she read it and handed it in silence to her mother.

Madame d'Estanville grew white with passion, and she looked at Monsieur de Belleville.

"You have taken matters into your own hands," she said, angrily.

"I have," he answered, calmly, "and I believe my young cousin is not inclined to resent this letter as you do. I think you will see

things in another light," he continued, turning to Marie. "You will return a favourable answer to Monsieur Maître, will you not, ma belle petite cousine?"

"Yes," came from Marie's lips.

Madame d'Estanville started. "Marie," she exclaimed, "do you know what you are saying?"

"I mean to marry Monsieur Maître, mother," said Marie, firmly, while her colour came and went with startling rapidity.

Madame d'Estanville rose and stood before her. "Child," she said, "you are beside yourself; some one has been instilling lies into your ear. This man is not your free choice. Speak, has Monsieur de Belleville——"

"Mother," interrupted Marie, "let us go on living here, and—— I will marry Monsieur Maître. Choice! Yes, I choose it."

"Then hear me," exclaimed Madame d'Estanville. "I know—I *know* you are only doing this for me. You have been told of the beggary before us unless you accept this man. You are sacrificing yourself for me, to give me a home."

"And myself," said Marie, as she caught the Count's eyes fixed upon her.

Madame d'Estanville paused. "Marie," she said, "I have yielded to the wishes of Monsieur de Belleville, and have received Monsieur Maître. My child, I have seen him, and judged him; under his false humility lies the spirit of his father; he is neither a good man, nor would he make you happy. If you are so blinded by arguments I do not know as to marry him, from that day we part. You may secure a home if you will. I will owe neither home nor means of subsistence to him. Yes, Monsieur le Comte," she said, "I know all you would say, all the reproaches you would heap upon me. I saw this man at your request: I have watched him closely. His smile is false; he is a bad man; in his eyes there is want of truth; if we were in his power, he would crush us, and if my child marries him she will be miserable all her life."

She ceased, and Marie, with a little cry, fell forward. The sudden relief, after the hours of anguish and misery, was more than she could bear. She had fainted.

While Jacqueline was striving with Madame d'Estanville to restore their darling to consciousness, Monsieur de Belleville took the opportunity of leaving the house.

He was in a horribly bad humour, and, most unfortunately for Monsieur Maître, he happened to encounter him as he was striding down the avenue.

With the usual injustice of a man of Monsieur de Belleville's character, he saw in the unconscious little man before him the cause of those emotions that had so uncomfortably pressed upon him, and his first idea was what a relief it would be to chastise him personally. Monsieur Maître was there by the Count's own request, nevertheless he turned angrily upon him, and asked him how he dared follow and persecute him in this way.

"But Monsieur le Comte," began the bewildered man, "you yourself assured me of Mademoiselle d'Estanville's consent."

"I myself order you to leave me alone," said the Count, "and take this opportunity of telling you that I am sick of you and your affairs, and that I wash my hands of you. I

have been subjected to feelings and emotions which I never have suffered from before. Who and what are you, Monsieur, that I am to suffer all this for you? tears, scenes, everything that I hate most upon earth, and without one child of my own. It is really too bad that I am to have the worries of a family man. It is all your fault, Monsieur; you have bungled all this affair, and I now leave you alone."

"If I directed my conversation to Mademoiselle Morier, it was because you suggested it," insisted Monsieur Maître.

"What a desperate fool you must be to do only what another person suggests!" said the Count. "That is where it is; how upon earth do you expect to succeed if you have no plans of your own? Am I your father, or is your alliance so desirable that I am to work entirely for you, against the instincts of my order?" and the Count drew himself up, and looked more like a pouter pigeon than ever.

Monsieur Maître got very white. "I am to understand, then, that all is at end, and Monsieur le Comte has resolved not to continue to assist me. It is well; and I suppose

I may therefore present my claim, and that I may depend upon its being paid."

"Certainly," said the Count, with an inward twinge, but speaking as if thousands were at his command. "And Heaven only knows what will become of that obstinate old woman and her romantic daughter, with the ill-regulated feelings of a paysanne," he added to himself.

Monsieur Maître bowed, and the Count, with all his sublime selfishness, felt a pang of the intensest anxiety as he caught the expression of malignity which showed itself in the countenance of the rejected suitor.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE sudden dispersion of the plan which, according to him, solved so many difficulties, plunged Monsieur de Belleville into various uncomfortable reflections: but as, among his many theories, he held that half the discomforts of life were produced by vague and disconnected fears, he began to reduce his fears into some sort of system, and to check them off (so to speak) in his mind, to arrive at the great settlement of this question. What was the first pressing question? Madame d'Estanville's ruin. Selfish, and utterly without tenderness, Monsieur de Belleville still had a feeling of family pride, which rendered all idea of publicity excessively painful to him; and then there was the conviction that people

would expect him to do something : if he avowed his poverty he knew well enough that he would lose much of what he valued. It was a different thing joking pleasantly about his tailors' bills, and announcing, in serious earnest, his inability to pay ; and if he did not prove his poverty, even those whose code was lax enough to excuse a thousand and one venial crimes, would still think badly of him if he neglected to assist a cousin holding the position Madame d'Estanville did.

People remembered her so well, so bright, so pretty, and so gay, bearing so well the many, many trials and mortifications her unprincipled husband had brought upon her, and as years passed on—though of course the remembrance of her became more dim—yet the recollection of her still existed, and the very resignation she had shown in secluding herself at the old château inspired a respect for her, which Monsieur de Belleville knew very well.

It was horribly annoying, and resolved itself into this, the want of money ; and how upon earth money was to be had, Monsieur de Belleville did not know. “I have not fifty

pounds worth of furniture in the world, and if I died to-morrow my fortune would not cover my debts," he said to himself; "and as I have already assigned it to my creditors I can do nothing with it."

Almost like an inspiration came the remembrance of Anne Hall, her virtues, her fortune, and her temper. Gifted with a belief in himself that inspired him with perfect confidence on all occasions, the Count suddenly stopped, raised his head, and smiled, "Diantre!" he said, "the position of affairs is not quite desperate after all; it precipitates matters, that is all. I shall lose my liberty a little sooner; but after all, we of the nobility have many sacrifices to make. Allons! what has to be done had better be done soon—and well."

In the mean time Anne had been undergoing the misery of "having it out" with Victoire.

Lady Hall was almost in despair. More than half her things were gone past recall, and instead of reproaching Anne she was sorry for her, which was a new and most painful position to be placed in. Victoire was confronted with

the man she had sold things to, and one proof after another was brought forward of her untrustworthiness, of her lies, and of her intemperance.

Anne Hall, priding herself as she had done upon her superiority in all respects, had always maintained that her powers of discrimination were greater than those of other people, and all this made it very painful to stand prominently forward as having acted without common sense.

But her feelings were destined to undergo a far severer shock than the proof of her fallibility. Victoire, seeing things go against her, dropped suddenly upon her knees, and began a loud and vehement explanation and defence of her conduct to Lady Hall. "It was Mademoiselle," she said, "Mademoiselle herself who gave me these things. What, Mademoiselle! you will not say it to your generous, your angelic mamma? Oh, Madame! I have done you a great wrong, but it is not I alone. Mademoiselle, you will not confess, and your mamma is so ready to forgive. You will not say the truth? Do you not remember your words to me? You said you had not money,

your parsimonious mamma was the cause of your looking so badly dressed, and you said these things will be mine one day; take them, Victoire, and dispose of them, only obtain money for me. Oh, Mademoiselle!" she continued, sobbing and wringing her hands in a manner that would have made her fortune upon the stage, "I am a poor woman, and have only my character, do not turn round now and desert me. You know you yourself did this, and also advised me to take the eau-de-vie that Mademoiselle Simpkins thought proper to mention to Madame. Confess all now to your excellent mamma, who is already beginning to weep over your conduct." This attack, poured forth with a volubility and fluency that prevented Anne or her mother from comprehending much of what she said, was stopped by Madame Biète; but not before Anne, furious at so much of her speech as she had understood, turned angrily and contemptuously away, and asked that lady for advice.

"To let her go," this Madame Biète advised, and advice so palatable even Anne could take no exception to.

Nothing could have mortified her more than the way in which Madame Biète regarded this adventure as a matter of course, except perhaps the tender air of pity with which Lady Hall testified her sympathy. Much to the disappointment of Simpkins, the woman was told to go, which she did, vowing that she was very ill-used, and they should hear more of it, &c. &c.

And it was only two hours after all this that Anne, sitting alone in the drawing-room, was found by Monsieur le Comte de Belleville. His first care was to ascertain whether she was already aware of the position of affairs at the château, and by drawing her out, he soon saw that she knew and suspected nothing as yet.

And then Monsieur de Belleville made his grand mistake. He had an idea that to succeed with Anne he must bear in mind first that she was not a very young girl; and, secondly, that she was so extremely sensible, that he could not exactly make love to her, or, indeed, pay her any of the ordinary compliments that would have come so readily from

him at another time. He considered that she would laugh to scorn any professions of affection ; but he considered her vulnerable on the score of talent and extreme good sense.

Now Anne, being years older in appearance than she really was, had never in all her life received an offer of marriage. Nothing, as a rule, men dread more than temper and a largely developed talent for "managing;" and Anne's temper was too plainly written on her face to be doubted, while she herself was incessantly insisting on the administrative powers that she invariably and successfully exercised. But with all her faults she would have appreciated a really warm and sincere affection, and it might have softened her ; and though she was too practical to sit dreaming of her possible way through life, and, unlike Marie d'Estanville, considered imagination almost amounted to a sin, she was far too English in her ideas to endure calmly the idea of a marriage such as Monsieur de Belleville so jauntily and pleasantly set before her.

At first she could not quite understand what he was saying ; and when the truth flashed upon

her, she coloured angrily—she considered his words almost an insult. She was also thoroughly put out, and therefore Monsieur de Belleville could hardly have chosen a more unpropitious moment, or mistaken more completely the character he had to deal with.

“I do not insult your extreme good sense, my dear Mademoiselle, by avowing any of those feverish passions which you and I have doubtless experienced in former days, but which now have given way to the plain dictates of reason and common sense.”

If Anne had only possessed a sense of the ridiculous, she might have drawn infinite amusement out of this scene; as it was, all she did was to get extremely red and very angry—so angry that nothing but the Count’s enormously thick self-love prevented his seeing at once how the ground lay.

The Count waited a few moments for an answer, and finding the silence very embarrassing, began again—“You are so extremely sensible, my dear Mademoiselle, that I know you will appreciate my frankness. We need not pretend to be in love; let us leave that folly to

younger people ; you doubtless have tender memories, I myself have many ;” and the elderly Count gave a plethoric sigh, and looked at the ceiling. “ We will cherish these memories, Mademoiselle ; we will be tender with them ; and I think, with your substantial fortune and my modest one, we may make out a very happy ménage together. How say you ?”

“ I say,” said Anne, who was almost too angry to preserve the dignity of demeanour she desired, “ that your proposal is little short of an insult.”

“ An insult !” exclaimed Monsieur de Belleville. “ Mademoiselle does not understand ; Mademoiselle imperfectly comprehends. ‘ I offer Mademoiselle my name—my honourable name,’ he continued, striking his chest with his outspread fingers, “ and Mademoiselle speaks of insult !”

“ It is an insult to me,” said Anne Hall, who thought this day likely to be long marked in her calendar. “ You offer me your ruined fortunes and your name ; in plain words, I am to support you, and in return receive the title of Countess, which I do not care one bit about.”

“Mademoiselle,” exclaimed the Count, “really, my honour I never was so much surprised in my life.”

“Possibly,” said Anne; “it is also possible that you never before asked an English girl to marry you, coolly telling her at the same time that you cared nothing about her. It is true you put it into very fine language, but that is the real meaning.”

The Count came to the conclusion that sensible women were not in his line. Bowing with an appearance of emotion, he said, “You mistake altogether, my charming Mademoiselle. I have the most profound admiration for you, your character, and your virtues.”

“You know nothing about me,” said Anne; “and I beg that you will go away now, and give up talking in this way. Nothing upon earth would induce me to marry you, so there is no use in prolonging this interview.”

The Count assumed an air of profound dejection. “Mademoiselle,” he said, rising, “you are very hard—very severe upon me: at any rate may I trust that you will not mention my want of success? You will preserve my secret.”

Anne smiled scornfully. "Depend upon it, Monsieur le Comte," she said, coldly, "that I will be the last to publish an interview in which you have placed both yourself and me in a ridiculous position;" and before the Count could put his supreme indignation into words Anne left the room.

"I have spoken too soon," said the Count, as he went home. "She will of course hear reason by-and-by; these stiff English characters require a frightful amount of diplomacy. I will put a little more love into my next interview, and all will go well."

CHAPTER XXX.

"I LOVE you! I adore you, Marie!" Sam Hall spoke, seizing the one opportunity he had found, and making the most of that opportunity; "I love you passionately!"

He was standing in front of her, holding in his firm grasp the two little hands outstretched half-appealingly towards him.

Marie d'Estanville, her dark eyes swimming with tears, looked at him, shy, frightened, pleased, without finding courage to speak.

"Will you not say one word? will you not speak to me?" he said, entreatingly.

"Monsieur Hall!"

"Will you not tell me you do not hate me?" he asked again.

"Monsieur Hall!"

“Oh! Marie; ever since I first saw you my one dream has been to have you for my wife. Will you be my wife? to be cherished and loved as never wife was before. Will you not speak to me?”

“Monsieur Hall!”

Sam started, and so did Marie; it was not Marie who said it this time, it was Adèle Morier.

Sam Hall would have given worlds had Adèle remained away till Marie's answer had been given in words; but it was something to note that when she was thus startled she went closer to him for protection, even from Adèle, her friend and companion. Drawing her to his side, and then releasing one of her hands whilst he still held the other, he said to Adèle, “I have been telling Mademoiselle d'Estanville how fervently and how passionately I love her. You must have seen how my every happiness has been connected with her since I have known her. Will you not be my friend, Mademoiselle Morier? Will you be hers? You are so wise, so thoughtful.”

A pang shot through the breast of Adèle Morier as Mr. Hall spoke. Why was it that

this happiness had never, would never come to her? Why was hers to be a joyless, sunless existence? Why was she to stand by and see so much happiness opening so brightly before a girl only a few years younger than herself? The very appeal made to her, the open way in which poor Sam, in his enthusiastic, honest love, spoke to her, made her feel so old—so very old! There was a touch of sadness in her voice, a look of depression about the mouth that gave Marie the first check since Sam Hall's voice and his passionate words vibrated upon her ear. It was misunderstood. She, poor child, thought that it was caused by the knowledge of something that would render all this happiness an idle dream. Jacqueline's words about her want of fortune came back to her memory; and when Sam in a lowered voice again reminded her that his answer had not yet been given, Marie said, in a trembling and faltering voice, "Oh! it cannot be; you do not know, Monsieur Hall; it is impossible!"

"Impossible!" he exclaimed; "why impossible?"

Marie hesitated for a moment; then she said

timidly, and with an appealing look at Adèle, "I am afraid it is. I do not know what to say."

"Monsieur Hall," interrupted Adèle, with her grave and quiet manner—a manner that gave an impression of her being so much older than she really was—"French ways and English ways are different. I do not know English fashions;—but you must speak to Madame and receive Mademoiselle's answer from her mother's lips." She drew Marie's hand through her arm as she spoke, and turned towards the house.

"I am most anxious to see Madame d'Estanville," said Sam, trying to speak in as calm a manner as she did, and signally failing. He was so bitterly disappointed by this interruption; he wanted to hear Marie's answer by herself. "Will you ask her if she will see me now?"

"I will," said Adèle. She had no idea that she was looked upon at that moment as a sort of monster; and her provoking placidity was inexpressibly trying to poor Sam.

He was also unreasonably provoked with

Marie. "She might look at me," he thought, as he measured his steps by those taken by her little feet, feeling in his impatience as if the two young ladies were purposely trying him, and walking slower than any two young women ever did before.

Marie d'Estanville was in reality utterly and completely bewildered by the answer to his prayer she found in her own heart. She knew now why death had seemed preferable to life with Monsieur Maître. She loved this young Englishman passionately; and love with her was no light thing. All the way to the house she trod on air; she felt nothing, saw nothing, knew nothing—save that Monsieur Hall loved her; and nothing else seemed to signify.

That old doorway favoured Sam when they reached the château, for only the small door, cut out of the heavy ones, was open, and Adèle passing first, Marie turned and gave Sam the glance he had so wanted. A shy sweet smile and a flush that flitted over her face, and he read his answer there, and it enabled him to bear with a certain amount of patience the intolerably long minutes that passed till Adèle

called him and told him Madame d'Estanville was at home, and would receive him.

* * * * *

Mother and daughter sat alone. Sam had at length gone home, and Madame d'Estanville, not without a spice of malice, was thinking of Monsieur de Belleville's astonishment when she was in a position to announce all this news. Naturally, Lady Hall must first come forward and give her approbation, and then ce cher cousin must once more be summoned to be told that Marie's prospects were bright as bright could be, and he would have to acknowledge with contrition that he had erred in supposing the fate he had held out for his young cousin as the best thing for her, was one unworthy of her in every way.

Marie sat on a low stool at her mother's feet, silent, quiet, with a heart overflowing with gratitude and happiness. In actual truth, the Sam Hall of her imagination was in reality almost an imaginary personage; but that did not of course make any difference to her now, only she was unconsciously preparing for herself the inevitable disappointment which seems

to be the lot of those who on earth erect a sort of idol, and endow this image with all the attributes of goodness, nobility of soul, and everything combined that never can exist upon earth in one mortal frame, and least of all in the good-natured, easy-tempered young Englishman with whom she was so desperately in love. The hero, as she imagined him, was a man who would thankfully accept sacrifices and cheerfully suffer even death, not only for love (that Marie thought would be very easy), but from some chivalric feeling in behalf of another. Unselfishness, devotion, she pictured Sam Hall with these qualities; and imagined that he could on occasion be the noblest martyr, as well as the greatest saint; and he loved her!

Now Sam, as he really existed, was a straightforward, honest young English gentleman, who had not the slightest predilection for doing anything disagreeable unless he was obliged to do it. In short, duty was the one word that influenced him, and a word that Marie thought cold and lowering. There was no merit, she thought, in doing things that one ought to

do—it was not like a spontaneous sacrifice. And this difference of character influenced their love. Sam loved Marie with all his heart, and would have died for her had it been absolutely necessary ; now Marie would have gloried in dying to prove her devotion ; and as it was not a question of anything so out of the way, she sat, her mother's hand held upon her shoulder, lost in the sweetest and happiest day-dreams, and feeling that her mother's happiness equalled hers in a different way.

And Anne Hall in the meanwhile knew nothing, and was studying French assiduously, in the happiest ignorance of her brother's present proceedings.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MONSIEUR DE BELLEVILLE was suffering from the continued effects of irritation of the temper, gout (which he would not call gout), and violent indignation against Marie d'Estanville and her mother.

The pain in his foot prevented his going to see Lady Hall. He was displeased with the termination of the last novel he had read to pass away the time, and which (written by a very young author, who considered all men over forty almost octogenarians) described rather too well the absurdity of age pretending to be young, and turned the attempts of art to replace the failings of nature into scornful and cutting ridicule,—not altogether pleasing to

the well-made-up Count, and not likely to produce a softening effect upon his temper.

He was swearing loudly at the inconvenient dispositions of both Mademoiselle d'Estanville and her mother, and making various plans for leaving his present quarters, as Miss Hall would not lend a cheerful ear to his request for partnership, when Jean entered the room, bearing a note from the very woman his master was at that moment anathematizing.

The Count took it, read it, and looked at it again. He could make nothing on earth of its contents. It was a kindly-worded note, merely asking him to come and dine, at a particular hour, that day.

But few as were the words, to the Count's senses, and his well-trained acuteness, there was the ring of independence in every line; no longer the slightest evidence of a woman with a dread hanging over her head, or a mother in despair about the prospects of her only child. "Something has happened," said the Count to himself, and he began to weigh probabilities and think over things.

With a mind too full of curiosity to be dis-

tressed by having to appear in a large slipper, and leaning on a thick stick, he arrived at the château in excellent time for dinner.

Excellent time, for Madame d'Estanville, wishing to tell him all the pleasant news she had to tell, had purposely asked him to come at least half an hour too soon.

Madame d'Estanville received him with her usual grace, but her whole manner was changed; there was a joyful tone in her voice, that spoke volumes to the Count, and she held her head erect and looked as if she were fit to confront the world and to defy fate.

The Count was inclined to be excessively dignified; he bowed a good deal, made a great many remarks upon the increase of the visitors to Ortan-sur-Mer, and descanted upon the enormous preponderance of the aristocracy; in short, "we must enjoy it this year," he said; "next year there will be a mixture, after that chaos."

"I wanted to speak to you, my dear cousin," began Madame d'Estanville, no longer being obliged to keep her own sentiments in the background for the sake of propitiating him,

and speaking with infinitely more softness than she had ever done—"I wanted again to put your patience to the test, and to consult you upon various points connected with the happiness of my child."

"Madame," answered the Count, in a manner that proved how much he had taken to heart the event so recently resulting from his previous advice, "you may command me at all times ; only, in this particular instance, I must decline giving any advice at all. I have come to the conclusion," he continued, crossing one foot over the other, "that of all things I am the least fitted for, is giving palatable advice to young ladies reared in the country, full of heaven knows what romantic ideas, and as head-strong and difficult to bring into anything like sensible conduct as—as can be," he concluded, abruptly caressing his favourite knee, and examining his finger-nails closely and attentively.

"Marie had a reason——" began Madame d'Estanville.

"She had probably fifty," said the Count, indifferently. "I never knew a girl who had not fifty reasons to give you why they should always

take exactly their own way, and never yours : they are never at a loss."

"But, my dear cousin," again began Madame d'Estanville, "you must let me tell you about this before you see Marie. It is again a question of marriage ; this time," she added, with a certain inflection of pride in her voice, "*le cœur à parlé.*"

"Some one you disapprove of, I suppose," said the Count, grimly. "Well, tell me more particulars."

He spoke with resignation, giving a sigh to his delayed dinner (he was very hungry), and another and deeper one to his shapeless foot.

"Some one I esteem and like," answered Madame d'Estanville, warmly. "Young, gentleman-like, and devotedly attached to Marie."

"Probably as poor as Marie herself," said the Count.

Madame d'Estanville's face flushed ; she pretended not to hear this observation, and she went on. "He is English, and his religion——"

"Passe pour cela," said the Count, indifferently, "but his income?"

"He is rich," said Madame d'Estanville, coldly. She felt that any expression of her sentiments about Sam's goodness, or the affection between Marie and himself would be completely thrown away. "You know him," she continued; "it is Monsieur Hall who has asked Marie to become his wife."

"Diantre!" exclaimed the Count. "The thing begins to be serious." He leaned forward for the moment, his expression one Madame d'Estanville could not make out. How could she understand it? In his utter and complete selfishness his first idea was no generous pleasure in a happy solution to the difficulties of his cousin—there was no sympathy for the happiness of the mother. Self was his first idea; though he had only a floating and vague idea of the possibility of eventual success with Miss Hall, his first thought was, "How will this marriage affect me? It will probably create a divided interest in the breast of the mamma. I must reconsider everything;" and the Count added to himself also, with a genuine and com-

passionate sigh for his own trouble, "There is nothing I hate so much as having to think—it is enormously fatiguing."

Recovering himself, however, he congratulated Madame d'Estanville with a profuse expression of satisfaction, and she was far too happy to take exception to anything, or to notice the shade of constraint that characterized his manner.

Nothing could have been more perfect than the way in which Monsieur de Belleville righted himself in Marie's eyes. "My dear little cousin," he said, "see what troubles and difficulties follow want of confidence; had you hinted that your heart had spoken, l'amour avant tout——"

"But Monsieur Hall had said nothing then," said Marie, with a blushing face.

The Count laughed pleasantly. "You are too beautiful to love in vain," he said, "and besides—I could have brought things to an immediate conclusion."

Marie gratefully reflected that he had not interfered in any way; all had been just what

it should have been, and with her heart full of love and thankfulness, Mademoiselle d'Estanville went to rest that night the happiest of all the party at the old château.

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